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*Dedicated to*  
Prof. Martha Nussbaum  
*on her 75th Birth Anniversary*

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# Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics

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# Milk and Honey: Plato's Take on Inspiration in the *Ion*

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THOMAS LEDDY

**Abstract:** Is “inspired” just another word for “creative” or “brilliant” or even just “motivated,” or does it describe something else? Given a secularized worldview, can we recover for the idea of “inspiration” something that goes beyond this? Beginning with a comparison of Book X of the *Republic* and the *Ion* I argue that the “milk and honey” and the related “bee” passages in the *Ion* provide the interpretive key to the dialogue which, in turn, provides us with an alternative model for the appreciation of nature, everyday life, and interpretation itself: a model that neither Socrates nor Plato would have accepted, but which they inspire.

**Keywords:** Plato, inspiration, *Ion*, interpretation, everyday aesthetics

Socrates claims that *Ion* does not have art, but merely inspiration. But what is inspiration? To stackle this question we need to first look at the ways the word is normally used today.<sup>1</sup> The common current meaning of “inspiration” is some person or thing that motivates actions that are creative, or at least good. So a student might say that her mother is her inspiration and mean that her mother is an ideal she looks to when seeking motivation. This popular use of the term is far from the idea of “divine prompting or guidance” that is the word’s earliest English meaning, and equally far from the Platonic idea of inspiration as possession by a god.<sup>2</sup> It is closer to the idea of anything that prompts exalted thoughts or creative activity. But it is not quite the same even as that since it can be as simple as whatever sparks interest or appeals. A student might say that she is inspired to help others by some other person’s actions. But this simply means that these actions motivate her. She sees this person as an ideal she wishes to imitate. So, it seems we have not only secularization of an originally religious idea but also the transformation of that idea into something quite ordinary. Is “inspired” just another word for “creative” or “brilliant” or even just “positively motivated,” or does it describe something else? Can we recover for the idea of inspiration something that goes beyond this?

Plato’s *Ion* is often read in conjunction with Book X of the *Republic*. In both, the poet is represented as someone who does not really know anything, and certainly does not know what he claims that he knows. In the *Ion* the rhapsode suffers from a similar criticism. In both dialogues we have a series, or, better, a hierarchy with God or gods at the summit. In the *Republic*, God is the creator of the ideal bed, the carpenter is the maker of the bed in the world of appearances, and the painter is maker of the painted bed, i.e. the imitator. In the *Ion*, the God or the Muse is the first magnet,<sup>3</sup> which then gives its power to the poet, who is the second magnet, who, in turn, inspires the rhapsode. The audience, the fourth magnet, is four removes from the Muse. That the poet is in direct communication with God or Muse, puts him or her in the same place structurally as the craftsman (and not the poet) in the *Republic*.<sup>4</sup>

There are some differences between the *actions* involved in the two sequences as well. In the *Republic* the carpenter’s bed is a copy of the ideal bed, and it, in turn, is imitated by the painter’s bed. In the *Ion*, there is only one process: inspiration, which is passed down from one magnet to the next.<sup>5</sup> Also, inspiration is different from imitation. One can imitate with skill, whereas no skill is involved in inspiration. Inspiration is more magical or magic-like: the inspired person participates in the source of inspiration. He or she is *as if* “one with” that source.

But that would be putting it from our modern secular perspective. Socrates, by contrast, insists that when a person speaks in an inspired manner the God is using him or her as a medium. Yet Plato is ambiguous about this because sometimes he has Socrates speak of the poet as *interpreting*, and not just *channeling*, the God. There is a great difference between *interpreting* something, which allows for some autonomy on the part of the interpreter, and being a mere mouthpiece.<sup>6</sup> We can also say that the experience of inspiration is, for the inspired person, a religious experience, whereas the act of imitation would be secular, mechanical, and solely for the purpose of entertainment. Also, whereas imitation can involve detachment, where only the surface form of the original is captured, inspiration seems to pass on its inner essence. The poet passes his inspiration from God or the Muse to the rhapsode, and the rhapsode to the audience. Further, unlike imitation, possession by the gods involves a highly imaginative experience. Ion, for example, is ecstatic, out of himself, in the sense that, when reciting the *Iliad*, he almost believes he is in ancient Troy. This out-of-body imaginative experience is not described in the *Republic* account of the imitator.<sup>7</sup> These all might be good reasons not to interpret the earlier dialogue in terms of the later, as often happens.

It is also interesting and paradoxical that Socrates, although putting down Ion as merely inspired, saw himself as inspired in some way. In the *Apology* he often refers to a personal *daemon*, and there is a passage in the *Symposium* that implies that he is occasionally possessed by this inner spirit. Also, he praises wisdom in the *Apology* and says that he has no real knowledge. So, perhaps he sees himself as like Ion in being inspired by a god: having no knowledge, and yet having a *sort* of wisdom. However, Socrates also asserts that, although the poets and Ion may have wisdom, *he* is only interested in truth and knowledge, which would be inconsistent with his position in the *Apology* that he has no knowledge, although perhaps he has a kind of wisdom.

So what is inspiration? It is described as being out of one's mind. There are many ways in which one can be out of one's mind, ranging from the relatively innocent moment of being so engaged with an aesthetic object as to forget oneself, to the more scary experiences of being deluded, obsessed, crazy, manic, or insane. Socrates speaks of it in terms of Bacchic possession, a very specific kind of religious experience associated with intoxication, death and rebirth. He refers to the poets as "like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind." (534a)<sup>8</sup>

So, what is it to "draw milk and honey"?<sup>9</sup> This involves a kind of positive ecstatic moment when river-water, *as-experienced*, takes on a quality that is metaphorically intensified. This is similar to a description Edward Bullough once offered in explicating his concept of psychic distance. He spoke of experiencing a fog at sea as "a veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outline of things and distorting their shapes."<sup>10</sup> Along similar lines, we can say that the Bacchic maidens are "out of their minds" in the sense that they engage in a radical form of distanced or imaginative seeing.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, the Bacchic way of seeing is quite different from that of Ion when he recites Homer. His "out of himself" experience entails entering into a fictional world in which he seems to be "among the persons or places" of which he is speaking.<sup>12</sup> The proof of this, at least in his mind, is that his eyes are filled with tears when he tells tales of pity, and his hair stands on end when he tells tales of horror. To the audience, he appears "weeping or panic-stricken." These are distinctly physiological responses to Homer's imagined scenarios — very unlike seeing water as honey or fog as milk. Moreover, Ion's *object* is to see similar emotions in the faces of his audience — thus to assure financial success. In short, with Ion, ecstasy is as much a physiological phenomenon controlled by practical need as an imaginative one. By contrast the poets, as well as the Bacchic maidens, transform the natural world itself, or rather the world-as-experienced, and it is implied that they cannot control this.

Socrates then notes that lyric poets "tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way

from flower to flower..."<sup>13</sup> He goes on to endorse this view insofar as he refers to the poet as holy.<sup>14</sup> Such a poet is *active* in the sense that he or she goes from one source of inspiration to the next. In this metaphor at least, the sources of inspiration are natural, although these gardens and dells are controlled, created or perhaps only inhabited by the Muses. Perhaps Socrates is hedging his bets on the divine possession hypothesis.

Indeed, the metaphors for inspiration evolve dramatically over the course of these paragraphs. The magnet metaphor is quite automated, where each magnet simply gets all of its power and meaning from the previous one.<sup>15</sup> The Muse is a dominant magnet that swings all of the rest. The figures swinging from the Muse, which in theatrical performances included choreographers and musicians as well as the poet, seem like puppets. By contrast, the metaphor of milk and honey describes an extreme change of perception under the influence of Dionysian enthusiasm. And the metaphor of the bees in gardens is different again since it gives the poets an autonomy they cannot have under the magnet metaphor.<sup>16</sup> Rather than being swung to and fro by the Muses they are now roaming about in a land perceptually transformed by their enthusiasm. This land has "gardens and dells" and "honeyed fountains." The fountains are perhaps the flowers themselves, i.e. sources of nectar.<sup>17</sup> So, like bees, they collect this nectar and convert it to their equivalent of honey. The poet, then, *positively* understood by Socrates in this case, is someone who is able to take a radical aesthetic approach to nature, being actively inspired by what he sees and hears.<sup>18</sup> Poets bring songs from fountains and other natural phenomena which they experience in an intensified way that is both imaginative and sensuous.<sup>19</sup>

It is at this point that Socrates famously says, "The poet is a light and winged and holy thing."<sup>20</sup> The poet is holy in being able to find the divine in nature and in everyday life, including "the actions of men." Socrates admits that there is invention in the poet, but he also insists that this only occurs when the poet is "inspired and out of his senses." At this point, the language swings back to domination by the mechanical metaphor of possession.<sup>21</sup>

Of course the view I am presenting is inconsistent with the surface message of the *Ion*, the message also described in the standard interpretation, which is simply that poets and rhapsodes are deceivers in pretending to have knowledge when they only have inspiration, a kind of second-best sort of wisdom that can only be of value if one seriously believes in gods.<sup>22</sup> Yet at another level, when we focus on the milk and honey and the bees texts, Socrates becomes an advocate of Dionysian forms of experience (at least for the moment), ones that also involve a form of active engagement that is highly imaginative; and that, for example, entails encountering nature and life in an intoxicated or intoxicated-like way, seeing it as with heightened significance.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, this experience of water as milk and honey, or of dells as filled with nectar to be sampled and collected, is a kind of entering into another world, similar to what happens when Ion seems to enter into the world depicted by Homer. In both cases there is a kind of magical transfer of the self. However, as I mentioned earlier, the poet and rhapsode are also different in that Ion's movement is associated strongly with physiological reactions to strong emotion both in himself and his audience, and the poet's with transformed perception combined with active searching and collecting. This may indicate a sharp division for Plato in his treatment of the two.<sup>24</sup> The rhapsode's transformation is presented in a way that is not to be admired, whereas the activity of the bee-like poets *is*. Again, this is not the same as the aforementioned reading of *Ion* in which the inspired person simply becomes a spokesperson of the God, as like a medium in a séance, a reading that is certainly *intended* by Plato but only on the surface level.<sup>25</sup>

### Interpretation

Now connect all of this to theory of interpretation. At the beginning, Socrates asks Ion, in his typical way, to explain the art of being a rhapsode. The conclusion of the story is that Ion has no art at all but is inspired by Homer, as Homer is inspired in turn by the Muse. Thus Ion is simply



a spokesperson or a conduit, as Homer is. Yet Ion himself, at least at the beginning of the dialogue, sees his art as one of interpretation. This includes not only the capacity to give interpretive readings, but also to interpret what Homer means and to evaluate his writings. As Ion says, interpretation has been “the most laborious part of my art” (530c). He observes that this involves being able not simply to recite Homer but to speak about him, which he believes he can do better than anyone. Socrates *himself* had understood Ion’s task as not merely to memorize Homer’s words but to be able to “understand the meaning of the poet” and interpret his mind to the audience. To interpret well, then, requires that the rhapsode understand what Homer means. But perhaps it is more than that: perhaps the act of interpretation is like that of the Dionysian poet in that it transforms what is perceived.

Ion peculiarly insists that he can interpret Homer and Hesiod equally well when they agree but not when they disagree. We then find him agreeing with Socrates that a good prophet is a better interpreter of what each poet says about divination than he is. It seems to us (at least today) that Socrates is confusing the interpretation of the meaning of poets (for example, when they say something about divination or fishing) with evaluation of the truth of what they say (e.g. about divination or fishing). He seems to think, strangely, that to understand Homer is to understand whether or not what Homer or a Homeric character says about something, for example military tactics, is true. Yet, if this were what the dialogue came to in the end, it would not be worth very much at all. It would simply be based on a mistake. Of course what Socrates wants to say is that neither Homer nor Ion has a subject-matter proper to himself that he can be said to understand well. The fact that Ion probably is able to say better what Homer’s intended meaning was counts not at all. But perhaps “intended meaning” is not a viable option here either.

Could Plato be deliberately feeding us a bad theory of interpretation through Socrates (i.e. that the proper interpreter of every passage is the specialist in the art referenced) so that we could reflect more deeply on the nature of interpretation itself? Are we expected to come up with a better theory of interpretation, one that has a Dionysian element as well as an Apollonian one, to use Nietzsche’s terms? Could the passage on milk and honey be telling us something about interpretation too?

Socrates has implicitly offered or at least suggested an alternative theory of interpretation, one that does not see it as a rule-following activity in the way the art of being a doctor or a charioteer might be, but as emphasizing a radically different kind of perception, similar to that of the inspired poet.<sup>26</sup> To understand this different kind of perception we need to look once again at the metaphors he uses: milk, honey, fountains, bees, and so forth. This raises a question of whether or not he himself isn’t like a poet, and even a rhapsode, in being inspired and in inspiring, at least in these passages. After all, we have the story of his personal daemon in the *Apology*. This is the paradox: Plato has Socrates make fun of poets and rhapsodes as having no real knowledge of the sort that doctors and charioteers have, and yet Socrates (and hence Plato) waxes lyrical when talking about poetic inspiration, as though this were a good thing and even suggesting that interpretation of poetry via inspiration is valid.

In contemporary theory of interpretation the view that inspiration plays an important role in interpretation is usually discounted. Some authors believe that we need to accurately transcribe the intended meaning of the author, some bring in social and historical context, etc. But what about creative interpretation? What about inspiration? What role does it play?<sup>27</sup>

Socrates describes the poets as being like Bacchic maidens who, to return to our quote, “draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind.” As I have argued, the interpretation of this passage is the key to the dialogue, not only to its theory of inspiration but to its theory of interpretation. Both the good poet and the good interpreter are like ecstatic religious participants who perceive mere water as something transformed, as something with an aura of significance. They are “not in their right minds,” but maybe in a good way.<sup>28</sup>



But let's set aside the idea promoted by Socrates that poetry and literary interpretation are just the work of God himself, and focus on the way in which this alternative works against current views of literary interpretation *and* current views of the aesthetics of nature, both of which shortchange the ways in which creative imagination transforms the field of perception. Ion says, "I am persuaded that good poets by a divine inspiration interpret the things of the Gods to us," the things of the Gods being simply the things of the world perceived as transformed in the way the river was transformed into milk and honey for the revelers. After this, how can one take seriously Socrates' surface message that the works of poetry should be replaced with tracts on medicine, charioteering, and other crafts?

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> There is of course a simple way of understanding the Greek word "entheos" (translated as inspiration) in this case, i.e. as possession by a God, thus eliminating many of the associations we have today with the word "inspiration." Our associations are to some extent mediated by romanticism and by Shelley's romantic-inspired translation of the *Ion*. (see Stern-Gillet) Shaper for example quotes extensively from that translation. (See also Shelley's 'A Defense of Poetry'.) Our concept of inspiration is also influenced, by Freud and Jung, with the unconscious, whether individual or collective, replacing God as the source of inspiration. My own view is closer to Shelley's. I grant that Stern-Gillet has scholarship on her side as far as Plato's conscious intentions are concerned: but I see Shelly's reading and my own as uncovering hidden forces within Plato himself. In a sense Plato has been taken over by the God in writing the main speech of Socrates, and so his position here cannot be seen as straightforward sarcasm. This allows for the possibility of Plato inspiring a view of inspiration that is distinctly unPlatonic if, by Platonic, we mean what we get from an orthodox reading of Plato. Stern-Gillet believes that *theia moira* is just "elegant camouflage for the dearth of explanation." (195) I think that it is a recognition that the vision of the poet transforms the world into something divine or divine-like, i.e. the river becomes milk and honey in that it transcends the ordinary.
- <sup>2</sup> "inspiration" *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1993) p. 1381. This is the first meaning given, coming from Middle English. The second meaning is "prompting the mind to exalted thoughts, to creative activity"; the third is "undisclosed prompting from an influential source to express a particular viewpoint"; and the fourth is "a sudden brilliant or timely idea." The word "inspire" (*ibid.*) comes from old French and is related to breath: its Middle English meaning is "of a divine or supernatural agency: impart a truth, impulse, idea.." or to "animate with a (noble or exalted) feeling...."
- <sup>3</sup> Could Plato be referring to Thales? From Aristotle we have the story of Thales that he "apparently took the soul to be a principle of movement, if he said that the stone has soul because it moves iron." *On the Soul* 405a 19–21. Since Aristotle also suggested that for Thales "all things were full of gods" it might be assumed that Thales believed in a kind of pantheism. Sometimes his view is called hylozoism. It would make sense that Plato would begin with a metaphor that evokes the preSocratic physicists with hylozoist tendencies and then move on to more complex metaphors of inspiration.
- <sup>4</sup> This is consistent with an overall more positive attitude about poetry in *Ion* than in *Republic*.
- <sup>5</sup> You would think that the power would weaken or change in some other way from one magnet to the next, but nothing is explicitly said about this. Note however that whereas the poet is inspired to create by the Muse, and the rhapsode is inspired to perform or at least is inspired in his performance by the poet, the audience is not inspired to do anything other than to enter into the imagined world prepared by the poet. One could say that the audience is taken out of its mind just as the rhapsode and the poet are. So the difference may be due simply to our word "inspired" which can be applied to the poet and rhapsode but less so to the audience member (except perhaps afterwards if the audience member uses her theatrical experience as inspiration for her own creative activity.)

- <sup>6</sup> When Socrates says that rhapsodes are only “interpreters of interpreters” (535) isn’t that different from saying that they are just transmitters of the same meaning. An interpreter interprets: gives his or her own rendering of the meaning of something. The interpretation might be inspired, but that does not make it simply a copy. Commentators in general have taken the magnet metaphor to be the dominant one, but in fact whenever we have a series of metaphors in Plato, the last one is considered the most sophisticated: I shall argue that the sophisticated one is the metaphor of the bees.
- <sup>7</sup> Possession and “out of his mind” are often understood by commentators to indicate that Ion, and rhapsodes in general, and poets in general, are considered to be literally mad, insane. Thus when Ion balks at being seen as possessed this is because he does not want to be seen as insane, although this would not explain why in the end he prefers to think of himself as inspired by the Gods, though lacking techné. Has he forgotten that being inspired means being insane? Nickolas Pappas appears to take this line in his “Plato’s ‘Ion’: The Problem of the Author,” *Philosophy*, 64:249 (1989) 381–389. Pappas however seems to be confusing knowing from one perspective (i.e. from that of Homer) with a form of insanity. This seems to me a lack of recognition that, as Nietzsche taught us, all knowledge is perspectival. Of course Plato would join Pappas on this point in most cases. The interesting thing about Plato is that there is also an undercurrent that goes against this. Pappas thinks that if Ion perceives everything through Homer’s eyes he misperceives the world, and yet how can anyone fail to see everything through someone’s eyes, usually their own? So, do we all misperceive the world? Alternatively, one could say that the world becomes more animated for Ion when he sees it through Homer’s eyes than when he sees it through his own or through Hesiod’s. Pappas complains that Ion’s acquaintance with Homer rules out knowledge of what Homer is talking about. (385) Surely this is wrong: he knows very well what Homer is talking about when Homer is talking about a charioteer: what he does not know is what an expert on charioteering would say on the same topic. He knows what Homer is trying to do with the charioteering passage, and how that passage fits into the overall story and vision Homer is developing at that point in the epic. Homer is not interested in charioteering as such, and neither should be Ion. To say that knowing about Homer leads to not knowing about the world assumes that there is a perspective-free world, a God’s eye perspective on the world, and that the world is not known precisely through perspectives. Pappas is assuming that knowing what Homer thinks about something, and searching for the truth, cannot be part of the same thing. He writes, “On every important issue he turns his back on a search for truth, preferring to know only what Homer thinks about the issue.” (385) Of course the Phaedrus puts the idea of madness in a positive light (Phaedrus, 245): “There is a third form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the source. This seizes a tender, virgin soul and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying the countless mighty deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity. But if any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to naught by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found.” This quote comes from Morris Henry Partee “Inspiration in the Aesthetics of Plato” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 30:1 (1971) 87–95, 92. It is interesting and surprising that the madness of lyric poetry is represented as glorifying noble needs of the past and instructing posterity.
- <sup>8</sup> (48–49) “Ion” in *Art and Its Significance* Stephen David Ross ed. [Jowett translation] 534A. The Lamb translation of 534a is “just as the Corybantian worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite [make or create] those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession—as the bacchantes are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers—that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report. For the poets tell us, I believe, that the songs they bring us are the sweets they cull from honey-dropping fountains.” The term translated by Lamb as “not in their senses” is perhaps better translated as not in one’s mind. It should also be observed that “milk and honey” plays an important role in Biblical and Near East traditions: See Jonathan Cohen “Why Milk and Honey,” <http://www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/m&h.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> This passage is absolutely central to understanding the dialogue and its theory of interpretation. And yet it is neglected by several authors even when they are supposedly giving complete accounts of the dialogue! Jacques Antoine Duvoisin in his “Art and Inspiration in Plato’s Ion” *Literature & Aesthetics* 19:1 (2009) 17–31 never mentions the honey passage and only mentions the bees passage in passing. See also Bloom, Allan. 1987. “An Interpretation of Plato’s Ion.” In *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic*

- Dialogues*, ed. Thomas Pangle, 371–95. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. [From 1970] and Russon, John, “Hermeneutics and Plato’s “Ion”” *Clio*. Sum 95; 24(4): 399–418.
- <sup>10</sup> Edward Bullough, ““Psychical Distance” as a Factor in art and an Aesthetic Principle,” in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* ed. George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977) 759.
- <sup>11</sup> Perhaps an even better analogy can be found in Heidegger’s treatment of the Greek temple in his “The Origins of the Work of Art.” Heidegger argues that the erection of the temple transforms the world around it, giving a shining, intensified and holy quality to the raging sea, the rain, the rock that supports the temple, the materials out of which the temple is made, and even the light and air. For Heidegger, it is when the great work of art, e.g. the temple, is “set up” that the holy emerges. God only plays a role insofar as the statue of the god in the temple is itself the central work of art in the complex, transforming the whole.
- <sup>12</sup> Rana Saadi Liebert in “Fact, Fiction and Plato’s *Ion*.” *American Journal of Philology*, 131: 2, Summer 2010, pp. 179–218, argues that the *Ion* is the first text to develop a concept of fiction.
- <sup>13</sup> (49) (543b) The Lamb translation is “in certain gardens and glades of the Muses—like the bees, and winging the air as these do. And what they tell is true. For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind [nous] is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to indite a verse or chant an oracle.”
- <sup>14</sup> It should be observed though, as I develop in the next footnote, that most contemporary scholars read this not as endorsement but as irony. I find it hard to believe that Socrates would use the word “holy” in an ironic way here.
- <sup>15</sup> “Mechanical” may not be the best word here. Reading Russo’s analysis of the magnet metaphor it appears much more complex, and as I suggested above, it is less mechanical than the role of imitation in the *Republic*. Although I do not agree with Russo’s conclusions he gives yet further reason not to read the *Ion* just in terms of the *Republic*.
- <sup>16</sup> By not recognizing the development of metaphors, and only focusing on the magnet metaphor, Pappas misses the humanism of Socrates’ theory of inspiration. He writes that Plato “invents the blind magnetic attraction between poets and their audiences to explain what would motivate a man like Ion. These divine powers are no praise for poetry; they are to account instead for its inhumanity.” op. cit., 386.
- <sup>17</sup> The blog “Dido’s Tears” [blogger unknown] has a wonderful collection of later uses of the bee metaphor, mainly in Roman writers. <https://didosteart.wordpress.com/351-2/>. Some examples are: “Lucretius (99–55 BCE), *De rerum natura* 3.10–12: “From your pages, as bees in flowery glades sip every blossom, so do I crop all your golden sayings.” Horace (65–27 BCE), *Carmina* 4.2.27–32: I, “after the way and manner of the Matinian bee, that gathers the pleasant thyme with repeated labor around the groves and banks of well-watered Tibur, I, a humble bard, fashion my verses with incessant toil.” Seneca (54–39 BC), *Epistulae morales* 84, letter to Lucilius (“the ancient document most often identified with humanist literary theory” – Kathy Eden, “The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy.” p. 41) “We should follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought in; these bees, as our Vergil says, pack close the flowing honey, And swell their cells with nectar sweet.” It is worth looking at the blogger’s other examples as well.
- <sup>18</sup> Cynthia Freeland (2010) observes a similar use of metaphors from nature in the Phaedrus in her “Imagery in the *Phaedrus*: Seeing, Growing, Nourishing,” *Symbolae Osloenses*, 84:1, 62–72, DOI: 10.1080/00397679.2010.501198.
- <sup>19</sup> Note that Ion himself is not just a massive magnet passing on the same power from Homer to his audience. As Liebert observes, “Whereas previously he had conceded to a passive experience of his own performance, now he asserts his selfmastery over the poetic event and distinguishes himself as performer from the audience he enraptures (535d–e)” (201).
- <sup>20</sup> This is widely considered the most famous quote from the dialogue. Although it was much discussed up until the 1950s, it has pretty much fallen out of favor since then. Craig LaDrière’s “The Problem of Plato’s *Ion*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 10:1 (1951): 26–34 marks a kind of turning point. He says that the dialogue is remembered especially for the speech that culminates in the quote, i.e. from 533d–534, but then argues for a shift of focus. He notes that the speech is usually taken to be both rhetorically and dialectically the center of the piece. This is actually my view: it turns out that I am seeking to revive a perspective that was dominant seventy years ago and that has lost favor. He also observes that it was thought that Plato’s motive was to present this view of poetry. Of course this is what he rejects. It is hard to know what Plato’s motives were exactly. I argue in this paper that Plato’s motives are at least ambiguous.

LaDriere's position seems to be that this was a view that, as Socrates puts it in the dialogue, was commonly set forth by "the poets themselves" (534A) and thus is not Socrates' own view. This leads LaDriere to believe that Plato is attacking the theory of inspiration and seeking to replace it with something else. My view is that Plato seems to be enjoying himself too much in describing the theory, that the description is just too rich and beautiful, to be seen as something being set up for simple rejection. Dialogues are like plays: they present competing positions and, unlike treatises, do not necessarily take a position of their own. LaDriere thinks that the dialogue was considered "a slight dialogue" by scholars like A.E. Taylor because it was on a low-level topic, i.e. the nature of poetic inspiration. A. E. Taylor, *Plato* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 38. The notion here is that the topic of poetic inspiration degrades the dialogue's importance. This idea clearly comes out of the era of positivism and early analytic aesthetics (a late blooming of positivism) that is associated with a reaction against all forms of romanticism: the humanities at this time were seeking to be more science-minded, and talk about inspiration was embarrassing to this new project. It is a 'serious dialogue' according to LaDriere because it deals with the question "whether a scientific method is available for criticism." (26) That is not at all what makes it serious for me.

<sup>21</sup> Dorit Barchana-Lorand in her "A Divinity Moving You': Knowledge and Inspiration in Plato's *Ion*." in Alison Denham ed. *Plato on Art and Beauty* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) would agree with me that Plato is at least ambivalent about the poets and even presents them in a positive way in the place discussed. I would agree with her that "as if to compensate for [lack of argument] Plato provides the reader with affectively compelling images of striking and seductive poetic richness...Socrates himself is transfigured, becoming something like a poet himself..." which is why *Ion* responds that Socrates' words have touched his soul. (97) I also agree with her that "the transfiguration is only temporary...following the soliloquy, Socrates abruptly reverts to his usual manner of speech and critical posture, now developing the less attractive image of divine inspiration as a kind of 'muse-driven madness.'" (97)

<sup>22</sup> A standard contemporary view is what I would call "the sarcasm thesis," which claims that Plato is not serious or is at best half-serious when he attributes something divine to the poets: cf. Suzanne Stern-Gillet "On (Mis)interpreting Plato's 'Ion'," *Phronesis*, 49:2 (2004): 169-201. For her, referring to the poets as divine is a backhanded compliment. Although this line is at first plausible, it assumes that Plato is an unambiguous rationalist, a point that has been contested by many scholars over the last century, although, again, more often in the period more than fifty years ago.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche's relationship to this is complicated. Although in *The Birth of Tragedy* he portrays Socrates as a hyper-rationalist, he clearly gets his idea of the Apollonian/Dionysian duality in part from Plato. It is arguable that Socrates in this dialogue himself has these two sides, and that, ironically, therefore, *Ion* itself meets Nietzsche's conditions for tragic art, i.e. that it involves both the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies. Commentators who stress the rationalist Socrates at the expense of the Dionysian Socrates seem to be suppressing the later. It is interesting that the poets are not in their right minds when they make their beautiful songs because they fall under the power of melody and rhythm: being inspired and possessed is associated with the power of music. Plato then would agree with Nietzsche that the Dionysian is in some way closely associated with music, or at least music of a particular sort.

<sup>24</sup> See Silke-Maria Weinick, "Talking about Homer: Poetic madness, philosophy, and the birth of criticism in Plato's 'Ion'." *Arethusa* 31:1 (1998) 19-42 for a similar view.

<sup>25</sup> Liebert (op. cit.) says "Socrates condemns poetry for conjuring up a non-existent reality, and *Ion* (as well as the audience) for behaving as if it actually existed in the present." But does Socrates really condemn poetry for this? Or is he mainly just condemning *Ion*, the rhapsode, for making this into mainly a physiological thing: a transfer of hair stood on end and tears in the eyes, all for the purpose of making money. Moreover, whereas the rhapsode conjures up non-existent reality, in the case of Homer, a mythological world of heroes, the lyric poet radically transforms our own world.

<sup>26</sup> There are powerful arguments, to be sure, that can be addressed against this position. LaDriere in particular would argue that the alternative form of interpretation practiced by *Ion* is either (1) a puppet interpretation, since the real inspiration is that of the poet, or (2) impressionist interpretation with no real cognitive value. It could be argued that *Ion* does give his recitations something of what I have called aura insofar as he adorns or beautifies Homer with his interpretation, but that, again, this has no cognitive value. The idea is that *Ion*'s beautiful thoughts about and praises of Homer are of no value because they are not grounded on science. In response, it could be argued against (1), that the puppet/magnet view of inspiration is superseded by the perception of milk and honey view and then by the bees gathering nectar view, the

last of which does allow agency not only on the part of the poet but on the part of the interpreter. As for (2), the dichotomy between mere impressionist interpretation on the one side and scientifically valid criticism on the other is doubtful because it is doubtful that either extreme is ever achieved. What is clear, however, is that the scientific approach Socrates himself offers, it patently ridiculous, so much so that Plato himself could not have taken it seriously. Thus some sort of non-scientific criticism which involves inspiration in much the way poetry does can be the only viable option for Plato. Ion's form of criticism involves a "dance of the soul" 536 b-c which is clearly superior to that of the charioteer assessing Homer's account of Priam's advice. I find especially offensive even the idea that the dialogue had a "doctrine" and that criticism be based on "valid scientific generalizations."

<sup>27</sup> I have addressed this issue in "Overcoming Dualism: Textual Meaning Discovered and Invented," *Interpretation and Meaning in Philosophy and Religion* ed. Dirk-Martin Grube (Leiden: Brill, 2016) and earlier in "Creative Interpretation of Literary Texts," Chapter Sixteen, *The Idea of Creativity* ed. Michael Krausz (Brill Academic Publishers, 2009) 293-311.

<sup>28</sup> Note that the passage shows indirectly an intense interest in the aesthetics of nature, one not usually recognized in the ancient Greeks. The idea presumably is that nature is properly understood aesthetically when it is perceived in the way the Bacchic maidens would perceive it: transformed. I develop a view of appreciation of nature that incorporates a transcendental dimension (without any commitment to theism) in my unpublished paper "The Synthesis/Cycle View of the Aesthetics of Nature" which was delivered at the American Society for Aesthetics, Pacific Division meeting, Asilomar, 2016.

# Imaginarium of Aesthetics and Poetic Language: Reconciling Axiomatic Thoughts and Semiotics of the Abstract through Representation and Deconstruction

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**Abstract:** Philosophy has incessantly probed the enigma of imagination singularity. Evolution is sympathetic to us in infusing the powers of creative cognition – the access to imaginative perception. The semiotic, cognitive, and metaphysical are ways of theorising that unique faculty which comes naturally to the inventive mind. It is common knowledge that what we see is quite distinct from what we realise or objectively correlate. Dynamic objects inadvertently create a *representamen*, and in our subconscious plane produces a translatable immediate object. Imaginarium is our repository of all our emotions, the only gift that makes us human and the only path from debates to consensus.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic representation, imagination, inventive mind, objective correlation, semiotic deconstruction, reconciliation of opposites

## Conundrum of the Readable and the Unreadable

The quest for a reconciliation between poetry and philosophy germinated with the confusion, how are they different? Is it the approach to answer life's simple questions, or is it seeing at life in a mirror? Why is a mirror relevant? Is the relevance congenital or the relevance is by choice? Why do people run behind the illusion of freedom, when we are born in the innate slavery of nature's calls? Are we Active, Passive, Actively Passive, or Passively Active? The simplicity of the questions can be baffling to us in the face of their complex answers.

In the heart of object-correlations lies its randomness – assigning of meaning that produces semiosis. Semiosis is not the big bang of cognitive process, but a downstream of *presemiotic* or *protosemiotic* process, also called *indexicals*, commonly signified as context-sensitive expressions:

The indexicals that philosophers have studied most are the pronouns 'I', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'this', and 'that'; the adverbs 'here', 'now', 'today', 'yesterday', 'tomorrow', and 'actually'; and the adjectives 'my', 'his', 'her', 'present', 'past', and 'actual'. (Kaplan 489-90).

Imaginative faculty also incorporates an extrapolated process of *indexicals* proposing a more sophisticated theory of sociolinguistic identity. Imagination is not altogether abstract because it draws from the objectivity infused not only by social categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, or location, but also by the development of the persona by multiple exposure to variable orientation and stimuli. Imaginative "contextuality" (Silverstein) is bound by meaning and the "comprehension of stylistic methods" (Eckert) of expression guides the meaning.

The wave and particle paradox confronts in the concepts of aesthetics: the antinomy between art being abstract or concrete. The knowledge that the poet/artist has, waiting for expression, already has an imaginative contextuality. Kant asserts that "we cannot think of a line without tracing it in our thoughts; we cannot think of a circle without describing it" (Eco 67). But, to trace any figure in our thoughts we must have presemiotic knowledge or at least axioms to comprehend the points of constructing a figure: in case of a circle, all points on the circumference of the circle must be equidistant from the center. So, if a work of art or poetry is judgemental that work of art is concrete and is schemed as *perceptual judgement*. Yet, it is extremely difficult to establish that a



work of expression is inadvertently *finality of judgement*. But a work of art or poetry is one of the many spurts of a volcano; one explosion does not bring finality of the process of creation. Creation is a fluid phenomenon, the mythical “churning of ocean” to find the ‘elixir of life.’

The troublesome question is what instigates the imaginative singularity? There is a *definitive singularity* of destination for anyone seeking knowledge by whatever path one follows. The existence of matter becomes a reality only in its phenomenon and by the process of perception. If we accept that perception, as Pierce claims, is a semiotic phenomenon, it becomes a cloudy affair. Phenomenological derivatives speak of *perceptual meaning* only by referring to something that inadvertently precedes the form and content of meaning of a word and the coalesced expressions. A quadruped beyond our focal length clarity could turn out to be any of the species. When we can perceive the animal as a *hyena*, for instance, we apply *cognitive schema*, the data from our correlative *indexicals*. The unknown becomes the known, and we make an *inference*.

But words mislead us, deceive us by the incisiveness of binary oppositions of our finite consciousness. There is too much reliance on indexical distinctions as if these distinctions perfectly represent the ultimate truths and achieve a finality of judgment. The existence of the *Nothing* is something beyond our purist conceptions because the *Nothing* is the uncertainty or the probable trajectory of something that is moving randomly across space. The philosophical dilemma in trying to explain that *Nothing* exists because it implies a method of total exclusion from all that we know and consciously are. The unknown and the unknowable are confused. In trying to decipher the *Unknowable*, theorists tend to bypass the precept that it is *Unknowable* not because it is universally so but because the mind grasps only finite constructions and perceives it as the only true existence. We may be able to formulate a *zero*, but it is difficult to realize a *zero* by using cognates that are based on positive or negative indexical.

Art, especially poetry, implements a distortion of the regular cognates to re-morph their semantic attributes in newer correlative variations. Aestheticism in art, thus, stands apart from the statement that “leaves are green,” because that is one paradigm of realization which is entirely dependent on the theory of perception of what our eyes see. Factuality is a tiny part of objective perception until the perception expands, and art shapes itself on this expansion of multiple planes of perception. This paper creates parallel probes into the multiverse of *imagination singularities* both from the inclusive methods of Philosophy and Deconstructive methods of literature, especially poetry.

### *Black Rain And Fire*

Art thrives in the presemiotic cognitive phase and thrives by the faculty of imagination. The discussion of the opposition between the abstract and the concrete nature of art leads to yet another problem: can art be signified as intuitive and perceptual or intellectual and conceptual? If the artist has a purpose, then there is a conceptualization in the context of the art. A whole is made up of parts, like the base figure of triangles to form a circle; but we cannot discern the whole without looking at the relationship between one part and another and between the parts and the whole that forms out of it.

If the abstract and the concrete are opposites and are so binary, then art is the medium that performs the act of *balancing the opposites*. This fine balance is the undercurrent phenomena working as intuitive knowledge in every single work of art even though, they are individualistic in design of the abstract and the concrete, I suppose, are quite as *Content and Form*. The final goal of the artist then is the expression of the imaginative context and the outcome is the appeal which the work of art can impress. This appeal in aesthetics is the sense of beauty, whether it is true to life or a distortion of reality. If the rationale of that appeal plays upon the pulses of the observer, then that art is beautiful because it has fulfilled its purpose. If it draws criticism of sorts, it has fulfilled the purpose more. The tendencies of gloomy or macabre art from Rembrandt's *Slaughterhouse* to the Pre-Raphaelites liberates Beauty from the cutches of Classical dogma.



The ugliness then is no more a negation of Beauty but the other construct of Beauty. The artist's vision is as abstract as that of any rational person who does not live life on mere imaginative contextuality. The true content of a work of art consists of the artists feelings and ideas, the emotional and the intellectual reactions to life, and these regulate the activities of formative imagination that breeds life into the work of art. Even the size of a canvas or the design of a poem with all its stylistics has but one particular purpose: creating a perfect or ideal impression by an ideal actuation of expression. This is the *deconstruction* of the formalist assertion that form is finality.

The idea that form is *logocentric* fails to proceed its argument when it achieves a non-geometrical freedom of artistic expression. The dystopic realities in novels establishing its own semiosis in a post-apocalyptic world breaks the formalities of Form as *priori*. The development of cinematic art form, and André Bazin's argument claiming cinema as a live genre in his *Cahiers du cinema*, makes an impressionistic argument of individuality of art forms. But it was not the impressionists neither the later absurdists who by *balancing* the *opposites* deconstructed objectivity of *proposition* in art. It was S.T. Coleridge with exposition of a surreal landscape in *Kubla Khan*, who achieved a near perfection of correlating binary opposites into an amalgam of unified impressions:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
*A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!* (lines 31-36)

Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* is an incessantly enigmatic, stealth narrative poem – in ways that engage with questions of autobiography, politics, religion, and literature, among so many others. It leaves us, on every new reading, with a sense of 'the impossibility of assenting to its proper imaginative context, a meaning within a meaning.' *Kubla Khan* carries a symbiotic relationship with Derrida's notion of the 'enigmatic kinship between...nuclear waste and the "masterpiece"' (Bio 845).<sup>1</sup> The corpus of criticism on *Kubla Khan* attained maturity only during the twentieth century when the value-rejection of the poem as a *fragment* was seen as remarkably and cognitively coherent. There are metrical blips in the lucidity of its esemplastic imagination, but the poem was not meant to be lucid. Imagination seldom is lucid. The poem is about what Derrida's work professes: *the account of unreadability*. This unreadability carries as undercurrent the paper's initial undercurrent of priority of *presemiotic stage of aesthetic sense, the creative cloud*. "Unreadability," Derrida argues, "does not arrest reading, does not leave it paralyzed in the face of an opaque surface: rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again" (LO 116).<sup>2</sup>

The perpetual fluidity of the expressionless is not an opaque state and the unreadability is not a hidden contextuality that can be formulated in principle. The formalist approach, the geometrical explicit fails because the creative cloud thrives in *randomness*. The very concepts of exactness, epistemic certainty, in fact, is meaningless in nature. If literary and artistic expression indeed imitates and re-constitutes impressions of nature, then all literature and art in *inexact*. The *inexact* is constituted by *randomness*, the true essence of creativity. Excavating one discernible meaning of an artistic or literary work denies the *unpredictability of the unreadability* of that work. Philosophical approaches and formulations are inadequate to contemplate multiplicity of meaning so long there is a certain concreteness in the creative process. But the *creative cloud* is too variable:

"literature...always is, says, does something other, something other than itself, and itself which moreover is only that, something other than itself" (POO 33).<sup>3</sup>

The recurrent tendency to associate axiomatic beliefs as conclusions inadvertently drives the reading of literary works, in this case *Kubla Khan*. Why is there an impossibility of acceding to the appropriate significance of the poem? What does *Kubla Khan* mean – a name or a metaphor?

These are questions that open on to the knowledge of what Derrida calls ‘the absolute inviolability of the secret’ (GT 153).<sup>4</sup> What is cryptic or secret about *Kubla Khan* is not something that could one day, epistemologically, be ‘explained away,’ ‘solved,’ ‘revealed.’ It is quite a matter of a ‘superficial’ yet ‘inaccessible’ unreadability. Derrida asserts:

“There is something secret. But it does not conceal itself” (POO 21).

Or, as he puts it in *Given Time*:

“the readability of the text is structured by the unreadability of the secret” (GT 152).

Literature has a consistent inconsistency: a text or a poetic creation has, as Derrida observes in *Before the Law*:

“a text ‘has its own identity, singularity and unit’ (B 184).<sup>5</sup>

As with the example of Kafka’s text (*Vor dem Gesetz*), we presuppose that *Kubla Khan* is “unique and self-identical” and ‘exist[s] as an original version incorporated in its birthplace within the [English] language” (B 185).

The inference becomes quite simple – the words in the text, are not written post-sensation of the dream; the words are formed as poem in the dream, the state of trance. We do not require a nebulous hypothesis to comprehend that there are presemiotic supplements. The words are the replaceable to the irreplaceability of a singular vision. The synaesthesia of method and flashes of madness – “Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!” – are juxtaposed only to justify that the *deviance* of poetic creativity is the only tool that can fuse the “sunny pleasure dome” and “caves of ice.” The image figures as an irreplaceable singularity. But this irreplaceable singularity is always already compromised. The image is as fragile as its strongest emotion – the tentative balance among the cognates conjuring the image is fascinatingly intricate; that it may break anytime is its beauty – utterly perishable.

Our perception of the real world also morphs by participating in conditions and circumstances. Consciousness then is a collage of frames of experiences, and the imaginative singularities are the extensions of each of those experiential frames, yet distinct, because it guides its own existence by its own principles. If the world is a dream, an illusion, or a misnomer, it is a dream created in its totality and supported by a virtual life of its own.

Here, we come face to face with the enigma of consistent restructuring of an image – fragility is not the weakness of imagination but its immense strength of morphing into the other – *inconsistently consistent* shape shifting. The *deviance* is what Derrida calls *Differance*, and it does not define what *is* but what it is simultaneously *not*; the multitude of the contrary (Sanskrit: *itara*; the antithetical other). Derrida calls it *Iterability* (Sec 7).<sup>6</sup> The antithetical ‘other’ is one of many ‘others’ that have not been expressed by the artist because one expression is one context and without the context, it falls into the artist’s *plenitude* of uncertainties. Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* became the singular proponent of plenitude of the ‘other,’ the yet to be formulated poem residing in the uncertainties:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone: (lines 11–14)<sup>7</sup>

The “unheard” is the *unreadable*, yet as vivid as it could be because it is transient and must be related to an expansive reality which in all probability is permanent and complete and thus realizable. Keats’ heightened senses give substance and significance to this idealistic *perceptual judgement* of perfection – a most sought-after plane of fusions and fissions – touched only by imaginative faculty. Great works of art suggest transcending the *temporal perceptions* to reach the *indefinable other*: the call from that work of art speaks not the “sensual ear” but to the “spirit.” The

essential paradox of all art is in giving permanence to fleeting moments before the image is morphed into another uncertainty. The *perishable temporality* that time asserts has no control over the imaginative perceptions.

### *Probabilities And Necessities*

Axiomatic beliefs and formulations do not work on poetic endeavour because the need to find meaning in the entire evolutionary process to answer life's simplest questions needs a *deviant* approach, or a mindset. The balancing of opposites has not been reconciled even by the most ruthless of religious stigmatism, giving birth, in the process, to the equal balanced view of *good* and *evil*, "eternal light" and the opposed "e'vr burning sulphur;"<sup>8</sup> binary opposites as they are, yet equated on the same cognitive plane. The reconciliation of opposites expands itself with artistic endeavour towards states of singularities; each singularity is a complete impression and is immutable. Infinite states of immutability engender variations and too many variations create *chaos effect*.

The associative connection between the infinite elements of *chaos* or the abstract, *dislocated* images are reconciled through imagination. A disassociation from the objects of perceptual judgement engenders the probability of not ever reconciling the chaos. The artist struggles to keep the associative connection intact even to the extent of subduing the conscious limitations. Although art is artifice, fictitious, and bypasses scientific axioms, yet it must impress a vital flow. It is not necessary for art to be life-like, but it must have associative connection with life and by that connection reconcile the opposites.

It is possible to create a train of reasoning to formulate an argument that explains the *ideological content* of art. But what any work of art achieves is immediate conviction because the cognitive bubble that it creates has laws of its own which can be explained scientifically and philosophically. Scientific logic and philosophy equally apply in this parallel world, a real existence gets justified because it has its own necessities and probabilities. It is here we can ascertain that a *finality of judgement* cannot be reached for human existence because the human mind lies not only in the *perceived real* but also in the *purposive virtual*.

The artist's work is purposive; even when the purpose is a distortion. But again, distortion and deviation is the lifeblood of creativity. The entire world of advertisement draws ontological inspiration for its being from this simple understanding of *deviance*. Each deviance is a neon-sign, the bright digital billboard, the striking ideological premise that achieves fulfillment by its *deviant* syntactic. But deviance comes with its own unreadability and the success of advertising art form is in stirring the lethargic cognates. The poetic justice lies in this ability of its semiosis to pique newer perceptual singularities breaking the stalemate of regular syntactic and semantic.

### *Phantasmic Organization*

Perceptual singularity has no relation to moral principles – it is not time bound to go or arrive – a transience of it being the singular is a perception of it. Perceptual singularity is not entirely distinct from that of integral Knowledge, which presupposes integral Reality. This precept of integral Reality is Truth consciousness that validates itself on the consciousness of the Reality. The phenomenon of semiosis is limited by its functionalities of indications leading to the inference that Knowledge is a higher degree of Ignorance because it stays shy of the Absolute or Ideal.

The cross-genitive approach towards the ghost construct works in the same manner – every distortion of the natural order emanates from the natural order. The breakdown of familiarity is the cause of primal fear, but when it comes to literary creations, the signs of fear may be entirely morphed into aesthetic appeal. A statement seems exuding out of this reasoning:

The birth of super-men/women, mutant characters ate into the need for a ghost or a supernatural entity, or for that matter devils, demons, or the bizarre.

Macbeth would be brewing his criminal intentions keeping his mission clandestine. Hamlet, a scholar of the Wittenburg University, would have seen through the ruse of the 'supernatural soliciting,' have his suspicions confirmed, and this confirmation would be made through devious ways.

Shakespeare introduced the Ghost of Hamlet's father effectuating the dispense of several non-effective significations. The aesthetic torque that the Ghost achieves consequently intensifies Hamlet's psychological vacillations. The aesthetic appeal is strengthened by the dramatic truth that the ghost comes to the man who is susceptible to metaphysical doubts and broods, "To be or not to be...." The witches in *Macbeth* too enforce the same dramatic relevancy. The ghost and witches are the *Ugly* and the bizarre, the chaotic fulcrum which is necessary to exercise the semiotic *Other*. They are that *drug*, as Derrida puts it:

"We will always have unclassified or unclassifiable supplements of drugs or narcotics. Basically, everyone has his [or her] own" (RD 245).<sup>9</sup>

Thus, he offers what is his most concisely formulated proposition regarding the unbounded generalization in this context:

"Every phantasmatic organization, whether collective or individual, is the invention of a drug, or of a rhetoric of drugs, be it aphrodisiac or not" (RD 247).

He foregrounds the crucial role of language and especially performative speech acts in "the regime of the concept [of drugs]" (RD 229), starting out with the 'diction' in 'addiction' (from the Latin *dicere*, 'to declare', 'to say'). In doing so, he is especially attentive to the relations between drugs and literature, and between drugs and poetry. There are striking correspondences between the worlds of fiction or poetry and the world of drugs, as regards the sense of a sort of dreaminess or what he elsewhere describes as 'a suspended relation to meaning and reference' (TSICL 48).<sup>10</sup>

Poetry has in its philosophical workings a mechanism to amalgamate the variations: it manifests itself towards a reconciliation of the diverse. Each diverse state of existence, perception, creative cloud is true, and each existence of imaginative state intensely compels "the willing suspension of disbelief" (*Lyrical Ballads*, 1798) into *truth*. The truth that poets have sought is not a philosophy of life, but a theory of art intended to explain the creative process. Each creative conclusion is a singularity that is successful in resolving disagreeable dissonances. A collation of multiple singularities carrying their own rationale of truths because they are compelling conclusions, create further planes of chaos. Simply put, an infinite collation of orders does not create another plane of *order* but *chaos*. *Chaos*, then, is *multiple valid possibilities*, each with its own semiotic principle. Every petal of a multifoliate rose is true in its existence, appeal, shape-form duality, but meaningless when detached from their context of *being* the rose. The *rose* is an indexical, a signification of a certain order that stimulates and recalls a certain image. The indexical, parallelly, could recall the face of a person sharing the same call sign (*name*). This multiplicity in response is entirely personal and justifies the *chaos effect* despite its existential truth as *singular*. Conversely, other attributes of perception of a flower, such as fragrance, may recall the same image of a certain order representing a rose, even though the indexical is unknown:

What's in a name? that which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet;" (*Romeo and Juliet*, II. II. 43-44)<sup>11</sup>

The premise of Derrida's *unreadability* is not in the words but in the intention, the reversal of perspective, and in the failure of axiomatic approaches to comprehend the multiplicity of semiotic possibilities. These semiotic possibilities appeal to us as true, though they are formations of imagination, because their constituents are familiar, emanating from natural elements. The truth of every work of art is in its capability of deconstructing the organization of language, objects, and patterns of appearances in natural reality to reconstruct a *protosemiotic realism*, an innovative design, or designs, each as real in its infinite variations of realism and yet can connect empathetically to

our response mechanism. Coleridge found this *imaginative realism* cohesive with what he felt about dreams:

“In ordinary dreams we do not judge the objects to be real, – we simply do not determine that they are unreal.” (Coleridge 164)<sup>12</sup>

The conclusions of aesthetic appeal reinforce a maxim, *Art transcends rather than reproduces nature*. The regicide in *Macbeth* is horrible, but the sensory appeal of tragedy is entrancing. The trance is sensuous; the trance is *protosemiotic*, the *emotional empathetic cloud*, received by the senses. The intellectual appreciation of the work of art or literature comes from recalling the original experience, once the intensity of the trance gets a closure, a catharsis, though true catharsis, I believe, is an ideal, a perceptual judgement of closure.

The philosophical quest for the closure was achieved by the impressionistic revolution in art. Impressionism as an artistic movement is instrumental to the development of cinematic art and forms of expression that were not possible otherwise, the relating of the subconscious to dialect, has become true. Impressionism was a scientific approach towards a meticulous study of light and colors and the interrelationships that are possible between the macabre and the harmonious.

The imaginative contextuality of horrors and feeling of disgust that the witches carry is exploited by Shakespeare towards creating the appeal of the entire play of *Macbeth*. The ambiguity of sex-identity is purposefully maintained to cloud any *finality of judgement* as against the social construct of hatred and persecution of witches. A deliberate confusion, “Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair” (line 12) with its trochee, does not allow for a *perceptual pre-judice*. The success of art is in its power of exchanging, altering the dynamic objective correlations, which is only possible if art can create a parallel plane of existence, equally appealing in intuitive context but maintaining the necessary semiosis through its indexical. That is how the witches in *Macbeth* have their dramatic relevance. But for them, the dormant ambition of Macbeth would have never been awakened into activity, and so by sacrificing the superficial realism of factuality, Shakespeare secures the greater realism of character development. That this esemplastic world is appealing even after 450 years is ample evidence that art has its own contextuality, distinct from epistemological definitions.

Reason usually deals with abstract generalities, but when it is dominated by imaginative perception, the universal appeal is found implicit in the individual. The liveliness or truth of art negates the superficial resemblance often called *verisimilitude*; it does not seek factual support as history does; neither does it enunciate general laws as that with scientific logic. To appreciate such art, one must believe in love as heroic, chastity as noble, and evil as real, tangible, only to be ready for the deviant.

### *Flights of Negation*

Art originates from the personality of an artist. The restoring experience transforms from the factual interrelated images in the memory—fused in the vicinity of content and form, respectively altered by the artist’s egotistical self—towards a final expression. And artists have their individual progression of symbols, according to their cogito, which remunerates to distinctive emancipation of feelings. Artistic self is a separate entity, which elutriates the mind from trivial authority. The debate on the relative priority of ‘form’ and ‘content’ is insoluble as the question whether the hen came first or the egg. Form and content aren’t two separate camps but represents an almost double-helical structure of twined chains, supportive towards a final expression. The paradox is quantitative and up to some degree, figurative. The voice is the ‘form’, which carries the ‘content’ of music, or mere words—as W. B. Yeats justifies in his *Among School Children: VIII*

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance? (lines 7–8)<sup>13</sup>

The “dancer” and the “dance” qualify each other in impersonating the meaning of its physiognomy.



The first characteristic of form is adequacy; it must depict the ideological content in full satiety. This concept of adequacy, though, is partly misleading; because they qualify each other may fail as an artistic vision due to weak synthesis. Our deepest concern is to reduce this entropy around us. Dissatisfaction in the available elements of nature and psychological pursuits increase the necessity for harmony. Content is the seed, or the singularity and form is the variation of its growth. I generally agree that the fulcrum behind the sensible appearance is the eternity of Being, as Virginia Woolf puts it. "...our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading; it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by."<sup>14</sup> This, in its partiality, is poetic imagination—which does not abjure flesh-eye appearances, and sympathising to blind impulsive cognition, reasons its entity—that can alone grasp the "nature of each thing as it is in itself".<sup>15</sup> To Keats' observation, the purpose of imagination is to "dissolve" discordant properties of things and bring in absolute harmony, through balancing the "opposites"; in the sense that the beetle is as beautiful as the butterfly—that "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:." As in his preface to *Endymion*<sup>16</sup> Keats writes: "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted..." —

— not by mere rendering of value through artistic endeavours but an assurance of truth, a sense by which we should interpret Keats' famous lines from *Ode on a Grecian Urn*:<sup>17</sup>

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all

Ye know on earth, and that is all ye need to know. (lines 49-50)

Often are these lines read and quoted out of its rendering context. The question of the "truth" being true and whether "beauty" is the only truth exposes us to a greater question: What is meant by Truth? It is the truth of a ranging harmony, the capacity of the term "beauty" to be a transient quality of reflective emotions, which finds the common nature of Being that pervades the superficiality of relative existences; beauty as overwhelming on the mind and the soul of reasoning rationality—the aesthetic of such beauty, as in the power of Art, true in its own accord: having a truth of its own in Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*:

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul,  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things. (lines 46-50)<sup>18</sup>

This enigma of transcendentalism is a generic attribute of aesthetic values where Art presides. But such transcendental rhythms', being true to its functionality, is restored in its purity of expressions. The philosophy of Wordsworth is proclaimed in the colours of Blake's hermetical exclusiveness as much as Coleridge in drinking the "milk of paradise" is praised in the awesome worship of the "dancing rocks"—creativity portrayed with such powerful vision as the reading of poetic genius, suffers the Byronian pangs—losing its earthly blood to mere dusty demise, yet achieving the valour of the "blithe spirit" to fly to the serenity of seasons of "mellow fruitfulness". Yet this process of dying into life for a painful rebirth of the soul is the artistic satiety. And it is this painful consciousness of death, which comes out the creative gestures of utter solitude: the agony of unrequited love and the pain of holding to the creative genius.

## Conclusion

How does one separate activity from passivity or the other way round. The phrase "passive smoking" is a queer usage – there is no passivity in smoking because every smoking is effectively

active inhaling. Passivity is a *perceptual reverse* of active action. So, it is with pornography – pleasure without involvement into the act but at the same time involved by imagination. The immediate connect or the retrospective pleasure is so strong that it generates physiological impact, culminating in responses that are most times involuntary. If primary experience is a tangible library, then *Imaginarium* is equally tangible because it is physiologically *true*. Because it involves sensory and meta-sensory impulses, the overall physiological impact is at times more fulfilling. The sense of fulfillment is satisfactory only because it is self-manipulated and can involve an infinite array of characters, who are beyond reach or dissatisfaction. This is the beginning of *de corpore experientia*<sup>19</sup>, a proto-humorous tract. Most times it is *apocalyptic*, dying into the self only to be liberated from the gravitated state of reality.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See 'Biodegradables' translated by Peggy Kamuf (12–73), *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1989.
- <sup>2</sup> See 'Living On' translated by James Hulbert (75–176), in Harold Bloom *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New York: Seabury Press, 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> See 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"' translated by David Wood (5–22), in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood, Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1992.
- <sup>4</sup> See *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.
- <sup>5</sup> See 'Before the Law', translated by Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston (181–220), in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- <sup>6</sup> See 'Signature Event Context', translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (1–23), in *Limited Inc*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is a poem written by the English Romantic poet John Keats in May 1819, first published anonymously in *Annals of the Fine Arts* for 1819.
- <sup>8</sup> See. *Paradise Lost* Book I. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2003.  
 – *A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,* (61)  
*As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames*  
*No light; but rather darkness visible*  
*Served only to discover sights of woe,*  
*Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace* (65)  
*And rest can never dwell, hope never comes*  
*That comes to all, but torture without end*  
*Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed*  
*With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.* (69)
- <sup>9</sup> See 'The Rhetoric of Drugs', translated by Michael Israel, in *Points Interviews*, 1974–94, ed. Elisabeth Weber, translated by Peggy Kamuf (228–254) and others, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- <sup>10</sup> See 'This Strange Institution Called Literature' translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 33–75.
- <sup>11</sup> See Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005.
- <sup>12</sup> See Coleridge, Samuel. Taylor. *Miscellanies, Aesthetic, and Literary*. London, 1885.
- <sup>13</sup> See Pericles Lewis's *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (58–59), Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> See *To the Lighthouse* (1932), p. 100.
- <sup>15</sup> "What distinguishes poetic from religious or philosophical apprehension is not that it turns away from reality, but that it lies open to and eager in watch for reality at doors and windows which with them are barred or blind." (Herford).



- <sup>16</sup> See Keats, John. *Endymion*. Spain: CreateSpace Independent Pub, 2014.
- <sup>17</sup> See Keats, John. *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (Complete Edition). Germany: E-Artnow, 2019.
- <sup>18</sup> See *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour*. July 13, 1798.
- <sup>19</sup> Out of the body experience.

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# The Inauguration of Formalism: Aestheticism and the Productive Opacity Principle

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MICHALLE GAL

**Abstract:** This essay presents the Aestheticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the foundational movement of modernist-formalist aesthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main principle of this movement is what I denominate “productive opacity”. Aestheticism has not been recognized as a philosophical aesthetic theory. However, its definition of artwork as an exclusive kind of form—a deep, opaque form—is among the most precise ever given in the discipline. This essay offers an interpretation of aestheticism as a formalist theory, referred to here as “deep formalism”, focusing on the thinking of leading aestheticists, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and James Whistler. These three thinkers defined artwork as a form saturated with an inextricable content, viz. opaque form.

*Keywords:* Aestheticism, formalism, form, modernism, mimesis, opacity

Introducing Aestheticism with a new, broad concept of productive opacity, I show that the aestheticist definition of art is actually of an opaque symbol, whose nature is syntactic not semantic, which *produces* referents rather than reflecting them. This argument touches upon other central aestheticist concepts, such as art’s autonomy, its criticism, the uniqueness of each medium, the completeness of the artwork, and musicality.

There is much debate about who should be considered the founder of modernist painting. Among the formalists, Roger Fry gave the title to Paul Cézanne, and Clement Greenberg gave it to Édouard Manet. Considering opacity in painting, I argue that James M. Whistler should be considered the founder. Already in 1877 Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (painted in 1875) was derogatively described by *Punch* magazine as “a tract of mud; above, all fog; below, all inky flood; For subject—it had none” (Merill 36). By contrast, Walter Pater, the progenitor of British aestheticism, called this artistic phenomenon *favorably* a “suppression or vagueness of mere subject”, and claimed that “art is always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, and to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject...the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together” (Pater, *Essays* 51).

Four methods of suppression of the subject to gain opacity can be found in Whistler’s work: the dissolution of represented objects; the suspension of the production of the painting after experiencing the depicted, letting its residual memory subside; the flattening of the picture; and using musical titles for paintings. Whistler strove to omit the extra-artistic object or referent from his work and aimed for ontologically independent art, which is autonomous and free. I argue that the “productive opacity” of art realizes this aim, an opacity which aestheticists denominated “the essence of art”.

## 1. Opacity of Visual Arts

Rather than history of art, this paper’s argument belongs to the aesthetics and philosophy of art, and specifically on a historicized theory of aesthetics. Besides being a painter, Whistler was a

member of a philosophical movement that both proposed aesthetic modernist ideas and supported burgeoning modernist art—aestheticism and early formalism in particular. Moreover, Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold* was more than a representation of an emerging aesthetic theory: its opaque flatness was a focal point of an aesthetic zeitgeist, which marked a philosophical turn that inaugurated modernist aesthetics—the aestheticist-formalist turn. Whistler insisted in his 1890 *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* that to view art, one should *look at* the picture as opposed to *looking through* it, namely, to respect its opacity. Whistler believed that art was meant to invite the viewer to cope with its substance rather than searching for pre-existing or preconceived extra-artistic referents.

The significance of this belief cannot be overstated, and I will return to it below. The shift from mimesis to aesthetic modernism was in some respect representative of art's resistance to the traditional relations between symbols and their referents. The advent of opacity was the epitome of an aesthetic theory of artistic formalist symbolism that I call "deep formalism", the main principle of which is "productive opacity".<sup>1</sup> This is a definitive condition of the artwork, classifying it as a symbol whose nature is syntactic rather than semantic. Following the aestheticist stance, I consider artwork as an opaque symbol that is based on a form which is saturated with content—a content that cannot be extracted from it—*producing* referents rather than *reflecting* them. The idea of opacity that I present here is linked with the unique relations between form and content in art. While 'transparent symbol' refers to external, preconceived content, opaque artwork contains its content so that it can be grasped only as dwelling in the artistic medium and given in its form. In other words, the artwork is not about its content, but the content is part of its appearance. Moreover, this kind of opacity allows the productivity of artwork, which Oscar Wilde, a prominent aestheticist, calls "a conversion of facts into effect" ("The Truth of Masks" 1073). The analysis of artwork's productivity, as opposed to reflectivity, is subsequently borrowed and emphasized by formalists. Fry calls reflective-transparent art a kind of "art of associated ideas" and contrasts it with the language of forms which "communicates a new and otherwise unattainable experience" (*Vision and Design*, 169). Clive Bell categorizes reflective-referential art as "descriptive", contrasting it with real art that "transports us from a world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation" (27).

Aestheticism included in the definition of art in the definition of art this artistic condition—the special fusion between form and content of the artwork. In doing so, aestheticism defied both the magisterial mimetic-realistic and the conceptual paradigmatic models of art. When the artistic symbol is sealed to pre-existing referents, it is at liberty to produce new ones. "Meaning" is thus newly produced by an arrangement of elements. The meaning of *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, which was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London in 1877 together with other three *Nocturnes*, three *Arrangements*, and one *Harmony*, is not constructed in a referential relationship with preconceived objects or ideas. The new model of art motivated one of the foremost theoreticians of art in the European 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the representative of the contemporary mimetic (actually conceptualist-mimetic) model of art, John Ruskin to write a disapproving review of the exhibition. Ruskin undermines the identification of the painting as a work of art, and Whistler as an artist:

For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay (owner and curator) ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of willful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of the Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face (Quoted in Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 1).

There is a clear similarity between Whistler's "flinging of a pot of paint" and Jackson Pollock's drip style painting. However, about 70 years after Ruskin's critique of Whistler was published, Pollock's opaque drippings received a devoted theoretical support by Clement Greenberg, one

of the foremost theoreticians of late-formalism and modernism in aesthetics. In 1910, Fry anticipated that by the end of the modernist era, art would become “a purely abstract language of form – a visual music” (*Vision and Design*, 167). Indeed, Pollock’s opaque drippings, as well as the work of his Abstract Expressionist peers, were accepted by the contemporary art world. Furthermore, opaque flatness was indicated by Greenberg to be the essence of the medium of painting, thus the highest accomplishment of visual art.

The concept of “opacity”, rather than “abstraction”, was carefully chosen to describe this trend. I argue that artistic abstraction, despite being crucial to art’s understanding of itself, mainly represented specific movements of art. However, opacity characterizes – or should characterize – art in general, given that art’s medium is of significance by itself and thereby its affordance is rich. Art is not as transparent as communicative media such as journalism, scientific research, or advertisement. Moreover, opacity is important to the autonomy of each artform. As Greenberg notes in his 1940 “Towards a Newer Laocoon”: “to restore the identity of an art the opacity of its medium must be emphasized. For the visual arts, the medium is discovered to be physical; hence pure painting and pure sculpture seek above all else to affect the spectator physically” (1: 32).

Greenberg’s imperative of opacity was expressed in the last stage of modernism, the foundations of which were laid by the aestheticists. Greenberg, like Fry and others before him, echoed the aestheticists’ propositions in numerous essays, sometimes nearly verbatim—at times with no explicit credit given to them. In “Towards a Newer Laocoon”, Greenberg reiterates Pater’s request for the musicality of painting to endow painting with the opacity that music has been fortunate to enjoy while the other arts were committed to mimetic transparency. Both Pater and Greenberg refer to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* from 1766 as introducing the foundations of modernist aesthetics. But even before Greenberg published his “Laocoon”, Fry attributed musicality to the opaque nature of Post-Impressionist paintings. This terminology was borrowed from Pater, who used it to refer to the opaque trait of the language of music. The content of music is “nothing without the form,” since in it “form, the handling, penetrates the matter” (86). Whistler’s decision to use musical terms to title his paintings is clear in light of the link between musicality and opacity. His aim was to draw viewers’ focus to the form, which in its turn would produce new meanings and referents. To the question asked in an 1878 interview “Why should not I call my works ‘symphonies,’ ‘arrangements,’ ‘harmonies,’ and ‘nocturnes?’” he answers:

As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour... The great musicians knew this. Beethoven and the rest wrote music—simply music; symphony in this key, concerto or sonata in that. On F or G they constructed celestial harmonies—as harmonies—as combinations, evolved from the chords of F or G and their minor correlatives.... Art should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it; and that is why I insist on calling my works “arrangements” and “harmonies.” (126-7)

Whistler applied this view to the very famous, relatively mimetic portrait of his mother, “Arrangement in Grey and Black,” clarifying that “to me it is interesting as a picture of my mother; but what can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?” (127).

## 2. Opacity of Linguistic Arts

Although 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Aestheticism was the foundational movement in modernist-formalist philosophy of art, it has not been sufficiently accounted for within aesthetics. Other disciplines, mainly English Studies, have a rich literature on aestheticism. Angela Leighton provides one of the major comprehensive studies regarding the concept of form throughout the aestheticist and early modernist periods of poetry and literary arts.<sup>2</sup> An earlier example is Jonathan Freedman’s

presentation of the dialectical relationship between the aestheticist stance and the social-economic sphere.<sup>3</sup> These projects address the historical and social aspects of the Aestheticist movement rather than its philosophical implications and motivations. They propose an approach to the subject that is substantially different from my own, which is motivated by concerns that go beyond literature, instead taking an analytic-philosophical approach. Literary presentations of aestheticism tend to see it as a cultural movement evolving in a cultural context. By contrast, the analytic-philosophical approach to aestheticism attempts to formulate an aestheticist *ontological* definition of art.

The aestheticist theory has not been systematically presented by a philosophical-analytic method. The aestheticist account of the unique structure of artwork (whether as an opaque symbol or deep form whose content is not extractable) is among the most precise ever given within aesthetics. This account proffers an array of ideas informing the debate about artwork.

Furthermore, the Aestheticist philosophy of art provided the source and inspiration for early soft British (or even European) Formalism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of Fry and Bell, and the late extreme American Formalism in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of Greenberg, Michael Fried, and Monroe Beardsley, for example. As it manifests in philosophical articles poetic essays, art criticisms, reviews, interviews, letters, and artworks, I argue that the proper status of Aestheticism has not been recognized.

As I mentioned above, the focus of this paper is on what I consider to be Aestheticism's main claim: formulating the relations between form and content in the artwork which renders it opaque, but productive. This argument pertains to other central arguments and concepts: art's autonomy, art's formalist criticism and judgment, the uniqueness of each medium, the internal completeness of the artwork, and musicality. Attaching the broad concept of the *opaque productive symbol* to aestheticism might help re-introduce it to current discourse about aesthetics. This current discourse is taking a visual turn in culture and theory, bringing closure to the linguistic age during which the artistic medium is at risk of being subsumed by philosophy. Art physicality, to which Greenberg pointed, can be brought back to the fore, given that the visual sphere is re-considered as the right one for analyzing us and our culture.

Reintroducing Aestheticism into the philosophical discourse is plausible for two reasons. First, it allows us to revisit the history of modernist aesthetics, tracking anew its starting point as well as the progressive evolution of its main ideas. It enables us to recognize the dynamic-dialectic character of the aestheticist, or deep formalist, theory and practice. This involves laying down the formalist understanding of the power of the artwork as a significant form, as well as the force of the artwork's composition, which is unique to the discipline of art. While formalist theories proceeded towards purism with regard to the concept of artistic form, the *symbolist--formalist* theory of aestheticism is more elaborate. Its concept of form emanates from a dialectical characterization of the appearance of the artwork. According to symbolist-formalist theory, art is both opaque and productive. Visual and nonvisual artistic appearance is defined by aestheticism as symbolically rich, yet non-referential, and not aimed at literal interpretation. In other words, the depth of appearance is not dependent on aboutness, but rather on the saturation of the form with what Wilde calls "latent elements of culture". The artwork's form is saturated with content but is *not* about content or referring to it. Thus, the second aim of reintroducing aestheticism to the aesthetic discourse is its special ability to capture the essence of art, and its ability to describe art as form saturated with un-extractable content, as deep form.

The first aestheticist to analyze the unique relationship between form and subject matter which creates art's opacity, both in visual and non-visual arts, was Pater. He was also the first among the aestheticists to argue that music is the paradigmatic art in that respect, and to apply musicality to all of the arts. Pater famously suggested that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music," because "in its consummate moments the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each



other" (*Essays* 53). Thus, Pater presents music as the epitome of productive opacity. Realizing the artistic ideal of total identification of form and content, the effect of music is not a corollary of transparency; rather, it is the power of composition. Musicality applies to both visual and non-visual arts. Even the non-material elements of visual artwork, like thoughts and ideas, are integral to its *visible* appearance: "It is the drawing, the design projected from that peculiar pictorial temperament in which all things whatever, all poetry, all ideas however abstract or obscure, float up as visible scene or image" (49). Accordingly, in his *Aesthetic Poetry*, Pater stresses the opaque sensuality of non-visual (non-sensual) arts, like poetry. Pater draws a distinction between mimetic-semantic poetry and lyric-aesthetic poetry, which holds a formal depth: poetry, for instance, that employs productive opacity, that does not lend itself to interpretation but to evocation. "The ideal types of poetry," he argues:

are those in which this distinction [between form and subject] is reduced to its minimum, and the very perfection of such poetry often appears to depend, in part, on a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject, *so that the meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding.* (52, emphasis added)

While many aesthetic theories present language's semanticity or intentionality as a primary constituent of literal artwork, aestheticism favors the syntacticity of the artwork, which Wilde called the "grammar of art" ("each art has its grammar and its materials", *Complete Works* 1054) and which the formalists called the "language of forms". Aestheticism proposes the structure of literal work as its main trait, "in literary as in all other art, structure is all-important," to which meaning is subjugated. Moreover, in the essay "Style" Pater coins the term "architectural conception" of the literary artistic medium as well as phrases such as "the physiognomy of words", and "that latent colour and imagery which language as such carries in it" (Pater, *Essays*, 78). Pater was followed directly by Whistler, and by Wilde, who (in a review of Whistler's *Ten O'clock* lecture) claims that "the poet is the supreme Artist, for he is the master of colour and of form" (quoted. in Whistler 161).

It is therefore apparent that, according to aestheticism, both literal and visual arts aspire to opacity, since their infrastructures are structurally parallel, both having deep form as their definitive core. Literal arts, although their medium is originally semantic, do not establish their depth from distinct preconceived meaning. Rather, meaning is derived from the profundity of structure that lends itself to sensual perception no less than to the intellect.

### 3. Opacity and Autonomy

Pater's theory applies the principle of the amalgamation of content and form, and of opacity, to all of art's media. Moreover, it logically connects this principle to the philosophical-essential differentiation between the different artistic media. Deep form, which is the unifying element of the different arts, is the very element necessitating their essential distinctiveness from one another. This theory of differentiation between the arts is later expounded upon by Wilde in "The English Renaissance of Art". It is further elaborated by later modernists, like Fried and Greenberg, who focus on this subject in much of their writing.<sup>4</sup>

It will be helpful to portray the theoretical mimetic perspective with regard to the form-content distinction, in opposition to the perspective presented by deep-formalist aestheticism. Pater and Ruskin both influenced Wilde while he was at Oxford, though Wilde explicitly followed Pater's aestheticist hypothesis. Ruskin, a conceptual-mimesis scholar, defined visual and nonvisual artwork as a referential symbol whose main element is its motivating idea, or its subject matter—what he often referred to as "thought". He suggests that "painting, or art generally, as such, with all its technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing" (*Modern Painters* Part I, Sec. I, Chapter II, Paragraph I). Ruskin goes as far as to claim that visual artwork is composed of thought.

Interestingly, the mimetic definition of art does not necessarily stipulate visual similarity (or ‘iconic similarity’, to some philosophers) as a necessary condition for mimesis. According to the mimetic model, the similarity of the artwork to its symbolized referents is not entirely of the iconic-visual kind. Rather, a correct representation of objects or situations is based on truthful thought, the embodiment of which supplies the compositional elements of the work. A conceptual grasp of reality, viz. the idea, is the founding element of realistic work and iconic imitation of reality. Importance is given here to the cohesive infrastructure which organizes the artwork, validates it, and supplies it with a sense. Ruskin posits that artwork’s visibility necessitates a definite level of transparency and dependence on its preconceived external referents. He argues that the artwork’s merit is defined mainly by its cognitive elements, not its aesthetic qualities:

the picture which has the nobler and more numerous ideas, however awkwardly expressed, is a greater and better picture than that which has the less numerous ideas, however beautifully expressed. No weight, nor mass nor beauty of execution, can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought. (*Lamps* 1-2)

For aestheticism, this argument (which characterizes the artwork as an executed or embodied thought) constitutes a foundational error of the mimetic and conceptual philosophy of art. In *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, Pater posits that:

It is the mistake of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music, and painting as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities of colour, in painting; of sound, in music; of rhythmical words in poetry. In this way, the sensuous element in art, and with it almost everything in art that is essentially artistic, is a matter of indifference. (*The Renaissance*, 83)<sup>5</sup>

The significance of this argument cannot be overstated. Pater here reveals what aestheticism considers to be the illusion of a preconceived, distinct “thought”, which is reflected through the artwork. This illusion is held by the mimetic-conceptualist model of art. Following Pater, Whistler protests against the viewer’s tendency to endorse transparency; he posits that “people have acquired the habit of looking not *at* the picture but *through* it [Whistler’s emphasis] at some human fact. So we have come to hear of...the picture that is full of thought, and of the panel that merely decorates” (*The Gentle Art*, 137-8). According to what may be called ‘contemporary conceptualist philosophy of art’,<sup>6</sup> at the end of the interpretive process, this thought, which is supposedly distinct, translated, and deciphered, is meant to transfer the beholder “back” into the world of extra-artistic referents.

Pater and the aestheticists consider this view to be a mistake for two reasons. First, the view overlooks the dialectic relations between content and form which are unique to art, and which render it opaque. Aestheticism holds that the content is not only originally welded in the form, but subordinated to the form and senseless without it. The content of art can be conceived only within the remit of its medium. In “The Critic as Artist” and “The Artist”, Wilde characterizes the creative process as emanating from form, and one in which the artist “thinks” directly in a specific medium. This characterization is later used by formalist philosophers of art such as Bell, who classified transparent, “descriptive painting” as non-art, stressing that if realistic form has significance, it is “in its place as part of the design, as an abstract” (Bell, *Art*, 27). The idea that opacity is gained by thinking in the medium itself was also adopted by artists who were theoretically supported by formalism, such as Matisse, who claimed in his 1912 *Notes of a Painter* that “the thought, the idea, must not be considered as separate from the painter’s pictorial means, for the thought is worth no more than its expression by the means” (*Matisse on Art*, 35-6). Matisse’s opposition to transparency is expressed in his criticism of the public who “likes to think of painting as an appendage of literature and therefore wants it to express not general ideas suited to pictorial means, but specifically literary ideas.” (35). His support of the idea of art as productive rather than reflective of pre-existing referents is expressed in the following imperative: “a work of art must carry within itself its complete significance and impose that on the beholder even before he recognizes the subject matter” (38).



The second reason for the aestheticist opposition to the privileged status that Ruskin attributed to thought in artwork is that it renders the artistic medium a mere means. This involves imagining art merely as a vehicle of meaning or thought, and hence replaceable. In contrast, aestheticism defines real art as inherently autonomous. For aestheticists, art is immune to recruitment to external obligations, and created for its own sake.

As the substance of artwork, deep and opaque form enables the self-possession of significance and immunity from recruitment, while transparency is logically bound up with recruitment by extra-artistic forces. The idea that real art is a form saturated with subordinate content entails that it is *un-recruitable* in character and cannot be subject to the public or to government approval. Contrary to transparent art, an opaque artwork cannot serve as propaganda. With this in mind, Rosalind Krauss aimed directly at the formalist's common use of the opaque grid in abstract paintings. Calling the Avant Garde a "myth", Krauss suggests that the modernist is working under the illusionistic spell of opacity. She posits that "[w]hat I have been calling the fiction of the originary status of the picture surface is what art criticism proudly names the opacity of the modernist picture plane", and "only in so terming it, the critic does not think of this opacity as fictitious" (161). Krauss's aim is to ridicule the modernist use of opacity to avoid recruitment. She attributes transparency to grid paintings, adding that "from *our* perspective...there is no opacity, but only a transparency that opens onto a dizzying fall into a bottomless system of reduplication" (161, emphasis in original). A representation of the linguistic turn of aesthetics, Krauss's view is a paradigmatic example of the intention to have art subsumed by language and philosophy. This is precisely what formalism is trying to prevent.

The link between opacity and sealing the artwork to extra-artistic commitments is foundational to the attribution of autonomy to real art by formalist-modernist aesthetics. Wilde writes in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" that art is at constant risk of being recruited as a result of the public's "desire to exercise authority over the artists and over works of art" (1096). For aestheticism, exercising authority over art is an attempt to force literal transparency onto it, thereby forcing it to emanate from a distinct subject matter or content and aboutness.<sup>7</sup> In "The Decay of Lying", Wilde calls on art to depart from public interest, an interest which is forced on art as its subject matter. Wilde's suggestion is for artists to assume indifference to subject matter, which will lead to an immunity to recruitment. Apprehension regarding the public's assertion of authority continues to follow formalism. Greenberg, for example, notes that complete opacity provides the immunity that results from art's resistance to extra-artistic efforts to "literalize" it: "the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself" (1:5).

Remarkably, in this text, from 1940, Greenberg repeats Pater's assertion from 1877 that of all arts painting is at the highest risk of becoming literalized.<sup>8</sup> He clarifies that when an artistic medium is endowed with dominance, as literature has been, its characteristic effects become the prototype of other kinds of arts. Consequently, those other arts conceal their essential qualities in favor of an imitation of the effects of the ruling art. Greenberg notes that "a confusion of the arts results, by which the subservient ones are perverted and distorted; they are forced to deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effects of the dominant art" (1:24).<sup>9</sup> Greenberg also echoes Whistler's warning that for the mimeticist theoretician who aspires to the transparency of art: "a picture is more or less a hieroglyph or a symbol of story. Apart from a few technical terms, for the display of which he finds an occasion, the work is considered absolutely from a literary point of view." (Whistler 146). Wilde concurs in an argument from 1882 "The English Renaissance of Art":

the channels by which all noble imaginative work in painting should touch, and do touch, the soul are not those of the truths of life, not metaphysical truths. But that pictorial charm which does not depend on any literary reminiscence for its effect on the one hand, nor is it yet a mere result of communicable technical skill on the other, comes of a certain inventive and creative handling of colour. (*Collected Works*, 16)

Aestheticists and formalists hold that since mimesis is founded on semanticity and referentiality that separates between content and form, the mimetic method leads different arts to self-estrangement. This estrangement is the negative embodiment of aestheticist beliefs.

#### 4. Opacity and Art Criticism

The agenda of art theory and criticism goes beyond a mere tendency of public oppressiveness. It seeks a proper literalization of different arts. This is the main concern of aestheticist philosophical defiance. Aestheticism distinguishes between the ‘interpretational model’ and the ‘aesthetic model’ of criticism. Under the interpretive model, Ruskin argues that the critic ought to require the artist to exhibit the “resources of his mind no less than the dexterity of his fingers,” and the artist should “recommend the spectator to value order in ideas above arrangement in tints” (qtd. in Merrill 292). Whistler notes that on this model, the critic “becomes merely a means of perpetrating something further, and its mission is made a secondary one, even as a means is second to an end” (146). According to Whistler, the interpretive critic addresses art as “mere execution” and supposes that “as he goes on with his translation from canvas to paper, the work becomes his own” (147).

However, the un-recrutable structure of the artwork should not allow the critic or the theoretician a textual conquest of the artwork to make it transparent. Aestheticists formulate a theory of art criticism that addresses the mistake of defining the artwork as a translation, or an embodiment, of a distinct preconceived thought. Interpretive criticism, seeking to extract a distinct content from the form, operates in what Wilde calls a “lower sphere”, as Wilde names it in “The Critic as Artist”. In contrast, Wilde asserts that aesthetic criticism defies transparency in favor of opacity”, and that it:

rejects these obvious modes of art that have but one message to deliver, and having delivered it becomes dumb and sterile, and seeks rather for such modes as suggest reverie and mood, and by their imaginative beauty make all interpretations true, and no interpretation final. (*Collected Works* 1031)

The aestheticist model thus respects the untranslatability of artwork; it even aspires to extend it by deepening its opacity through criticism. For aestheticism, the object of the critic:

will not always be to explain the work of art. He may seek rather to deepen its mystery [...] He will not be an interpreter in the sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has been put into his lips to say. (Wilde, *Collected Works* 1032)

Wilde and Pater thus assign criticism the role of guarding the commitment of the artwork to the essence of its medium, opacity and productivity. The essence of the medium is in turn defined as isomorphic to the structure of art:

The highest criticism deals with art, not as expressive, but as impressive purely, and is consequently both creative and independent, is in fact an art by itself, occupying the same relation to creative work that creative work does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. (Wilde, *Collected Works* 1028)

The main proposition here is that criticism should be “an art by itself,” and, as such, should substantiate artwork’s productive opacity. Real criticism addresses artwork as a starting point for new compositions, parallel to art’s engagement with reality. Critical work, like artwork in general, is not committed to mimesis or transparency. It is not attached to preconceived referents, and it ought not direct the beholder of the artwork to return to these referents or to reality. Criticism is free to proceed by offering an emergent creation. Moreover, Wilde argues that critical work, being one level further removed from reality than artwork, exists in an elevated epistemological and ontological category. After all, it deals with established artificial forms: “the highest Criticism [...] is in its way more creative than creation, as it has the least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end” (1027).

In this manner, aestheticism elaborated the idea of criticism that is internal to cultural progression. This becomes a progress from one cultural creation to another, with no external reality involved and no commitment to transparency. This concept of internal criticism is applied by Greenberg to culture in general, where culture is defined as a self-reflection of a discipline towards its essence and commitment to it. Aestheticists first applied this concept to different art media. Their argument is dialectic and original, logically relating the condition that unifies different arts to the condition that separates them from each other. Following Lessing's request to separate sculpture and poetry in *Laocoon*, Pater in 1877 proposed a wider application. This wider application is based on the idea that each art has its own way of producing the aesthetic experience as well as its own "special responsibilities to its material" (Pater, *Renaissance* 83-4). Drawing a clear link between opacity and productivity, he argues that "a clear apprehension of the [...] principle—that the sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism" (*Essays* 49). We can see, then, that a subsequent trait of aesthetic modernism proposed by aestheticism is the internal, logical, relation between the dissolution of the distinction between form and content and the uniqueness of each medium. This untranslatability both of art of the different arts to each other is fundamental here and clarifies the idea of art as deep form, that is, its productive opacity. The contention is that a distinct, preconceived thought, commonly expressed in different media, is *not* to be sought and found in artwork. This contention is entailed by the infusion of form and content.

Wilde offers a similar argument to Pater's in a lecture on Aestheticism for an American audience:

health in art is the artist's recognition of the limitations of the form in which he works. It is the honour and the homage which he gives to the material he uses – whether it be language or marble or pigment – knowing that the true brotherhood of the arts consists not in their borrowing one another's method, but in their producing each of them by its own individual means, each of them by keeping its objective limits, the same unique artistic delight. (Jackson 17)

The principle of the distinctiveness of every medium assumes that in art that truly realizes its essence, content and form cannot be extracted from one another.

Embodying this view, Whistler flattens, abstracts, and seals his paintings. In effect, these paintings are opaque to any preconceived external objects, thoughts, and ideas. In the process, Whistler produces new meanings, insights, and effects of composition. Interestingly, flatness permits the dialectic relation between form and content. The idea is that compressing the content to the syntactic structure of the work – so that the content will be conceivable only in the form of the artwork – will render the content opaque but also evocative. Pre-existing referents taken from pre-existing reality are preempted by newly produced referents—even new realities such that the realistic character of artworks, which was demanded by the mimetic model, is preempted what Wilde calls a "sense of realness" (and what Nelson Goodman would later call "realist effect"). Whistler supported this practice by setting a custom of naming paintings in musical terms. "By using the word 'nocturne'," he explained to the judge in his lawsuit against Ruskin, "I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. A nocturne is an arrangement of line, form and color first" (Merill 144).

This dialectical move represented Pater's formulation of the concept of musicality, and his philosophical call to apply musicality to the different arts. "One of the chief functions of aesthetic criticism, dealing with the products of art, new or old," Pater argues, "is to estimate the degree in which each of those products approaches, in this sense, to musical law" (Pater, *Essays* 53). The idea is *not* to turn non-musical media into music—quite the opposite. Musicality, rather than literality, will enable non-musical arts to be themselves and be free to commit to their essence. Of all arts, music is considered by Pater to be "the art which most completely realizes this artistic

ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form” (Pater, *Renaissance* 88). Applying musicality to different arts enables each art to reach this ideal. Wilde writes in *De Profundis* that musicality is a structure “in which all subject is absorbed in expression and cannot be separated from it,” and he presents music as a paradigmatic example for “a spirit dwelling in external things” (*Complete Works* 919–20).

Aestheticism includes visual arts and literary arts in its exclusion of mimesis and literality for the sake of musical opacity. This inclusion is for the sake of a philosophical unification of the different arts as philosophically different kinds of deep form (of artistic media). The exclusion of mimesis, literality, and transparency from the definition of art is an attempt to set a new shared philosophical foundation for different kinds of artistic media. This philosophical unification necessitates a philosophical distinction between the various arts, along with the essential uniqueness of each art. Wilde argues that “in poetry too the real poetic quality comes never from the subject but from an inventive handling of rhythmical language and the sensuous life of verse” (Jackson 16). For Wilde, overcoming transparent literality especially by poetry and literature is significant to the depth of the form of the work. Literature and poetry only seldom attain musicality. Using a linguistic medium, they are inclined to be literal and semantic or referential. “Real” linguistic arts, therefore, may be more musical than music. The productive opaque structure of deep form that music assumes relatively effortlessly, is rarely gained by poetry and literature due to their originally semantic nature. However, overcoming semanticity, which is originally inherent to the poetic medium, may bring about a powerful renouncement of pre-conceived referents, which moves from the reflection of referents into productive opacity.

The musical suppression of subject matter that is to be subordinated to the opacity of the artistic composition, and its presentation as a definitive condition of art, was a critical moment in the advent of modernist visuality by aestheticism. This inauguration of aesthetic modernism was manifested mutually by contemporary philosophy of art and art itself. Ruskin expanded the definition of artistic mimesis by ascribing a dimension of literality and even narrativity to mimetic work: “it ought farther to be observed respecting truths in general, that those are always most valuable which are most historical; that is, which tell us most about the past and future state of the object to which they belong” (part II, Sec. 1, Ch. VI, par I). Ruskin applied literality and narrativity to all kinds of depiction, from figurative work to landscape and still life work. In contrast, in an interview from 1878, wherein Whistler was asked about the reason for entitling his painting by musical terms, he explained that the content of his *Harmony in Grey and Gold* was subordinated to its appearance: “I care nothing for the past, present or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot” (*The Gentle Art*, 126–7).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Gal’s *Aestheticism: Deep Formalism and the Emergence of Modernist Aesthetics*.

<sup>2</sup> See Leighton’s *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* for discussion.

<sup>3</sup> See Freedman’s *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* for discussion.

<sup>4</sup> It is well known that Greenberg supported the idea of the purism of different media, combined with the medium’s internal commitment. These views were expressed in “Avant Garde and Kitsch” (1939), “Towards a Newer Laocoon” (1940), “Modernist Painting” (1960), and “Avant Garde Attitudes” (1968). It is less known that those ideas were a clear continuation of aestheticist ideas.

- <sup>5</sup> *The Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, published in 1873, was re-titled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* in the second and later editions. The canonical essay "The School of Giorgione" was added to the third edition and forward, hence it is common to refer to it or to its subsequent ones.
- <sup>6</sup> The reference here is to the conceptualist philosophy of art that was formulated following the linguistic turn of aesthetics, advanced by Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman and others. These thinkers address art as language, whose meaning, aboutness, and referentiality are its main elements.
- <sup>7</sup> Wilde posits that: "The public imagine that, because they are interested in their immediate surroundings, Art should be interested in them also, and should take them as her subject-matter. But the mere fact that they are interested in these things makes them unsuitable subjects for Art. The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent" (*Collected Works* requires page number).
- <sup>8</sup> Pater suggests that painting "is the art in the criticism of which this truth most needs enforcing, for it is in popular judgments of pictures that the false generalization of all art into forms of poetry is most prevalent" ("The School of Giorgione" 84). "The School of Giorgione" which was first published in 1877 in the *Fortnightly Review*, was added to the third edition of *The Renaissance* in 1888.
- <sup>9</sup> Greenberg's concern about forced literality is the motivation for his philosophical support for abstract art in its defiance of mimesis. In "Avant Garde and Kitsch", Greenberg explains why artists, given the chaotic reality of ideologies, find it crucial to withdraw from the public. Greenberg raises this concern again in "Towards a Newer Laocoön".

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# A Metaphysical Approach to *Yijing* Hexagram Interpretation: Fundamental Aspects of Change

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R.B. SCHWARTZ

**Abstract:** This brief study delineates a uniquely modern, and at the same time, primitive methodology for understanding the *Yijing*. Metaphysical insights into its oldest structural components yield layers of coherent, new meaning, in contrast to the traditional approach of applying image-based trigram symbolism. The content of this energetics-based interpretive system, identified here as the *Fundamental Aspects of Change*, is developed from analyses of two citations from the *Yi's* Commentaries, the *Zuozhuan* and the *Xicizhuan*. Clear patterns of divinatory meaning emerge that offer guiding insight into our human condition. This study approaches the *Yi* as a four-dimensional construct of time and space, which explores the metaphysical nature of change. Freed from twenty-five hundred years of philosophical and cultural accretion, the *Yi's* essential meaning, and its potential as a holistic device for self-discovery, becomes apparent. The emergence of this holistic interpretive system stems from persistent intuitive practice, referred to in Daoist cosmology as *Fu Rou*, which was the basis of a series of sixty-four insight images, inspired by the *Yijing*.

**Keywords:** *Yijing*, I Ching, metaphysics, divination, intuition, primitive wisdom

“We stand witness here to the first manifestation of a new stage in the self-realization of the human mind in which the faculty of judgment is first exercised and leads to abstractions distinct from images...It would be a fallacy, however, to reduce these concepts entirely to their image antecedents and to deny the authors of these early texts the faculty of abstraction....”

Hellmut Wilhelm, in *Heaven, Earth and Man in the Book of Changes*

The *Yijing's* oldest components, although substantially undocumented, are believed to have been compiled prior to the eleventh century BCE, its early development difficult to examine, due to the absence of extant linguistic and historical certainties. An example of what Kidder Smith calls, “*The Difficulty of the I Ching*” are the many scholarly efforts that seek to interpret the four repetitive mantic expressions, which are contained in numerous hexagram judgments. Linguistic analyses of these mantic formulas have yielded a remarkably wide variety of meanings, and a variety of theories about their sources. Iulian Shchutskii concluded they were remnants of an earlier system of divination, their original provenance lost in prehistory.

Unlike the *Yijing* we use today, with its aggregation of commentaries, compiled over twenty-five hundred years, the older *Zhouyi*, also known as the Basic Text, was derived from primitive ideograms, often with obscure or multiple meanings, leaving it open to wide interpretation. Some elements we recognize as rational thought, while others had roots in a lost world of shamanism.

Several years ago, I undertook an artistic project, seeking to create an illustration for each of the *Yi's* sixty-four hexagrams; nonrepresentational images that attempt to convey meaning through abstraction. I had expected that project to be limited to my artistic endeavors, unaware that my intuition was continuing to expand its search for connection to the *Yi's* primitive spirit, which eventually yielded the new interpretive system described here. My insight images, by necessity, sought creative inspiration through an intuitive connection to the spirits of its ancient sage authors.

This unique interpretive methodology, which I call *Fundamental Aspects of Change*, organically organizes itself into sixteen groups of four Changes each. Although it is based on two well known citations from the Book's ancient Commentaries, it seems to have hidden in plain sight for thousands of years. On several levels of interpretation – holistic, metaphorical and philosophical – this new system illuminates unique ways of interpreting each Change, as well as deeper meanings for the *Yijing* as a whole.

Successful modern art is often as much about what isn't represented as what is. This process of creating art from intuitive insights required an exploration of the ways non-representational imagery can comprehensively convey meaning. Seeking to define an approach that recognizes both ancient Chinese culture and our modernist one, it followed naturally that these insight images should be as symbol-free as possible, and display few recognizable forms. My life's work designing buildings trained me in many of the skills I relied on to create them, most notably my experience re-framing and expressing function and context as environmental strategies, an inherently organic process, in addition to countless hours spent drawing by hand. And I believe that limiting my direction solely to non-representational abstraction drew me closer to the universal principles formed by the minds of the *Yijing* sage authors.

There are twelve 'ancient holistic practices' described by Brian Walker, in *Hua Hu Ching, The Unknown Teachings of Lao Tzu*. One is *Fu Gua*, the study of the *Yijing*, which Walker believes is the most important practice for beginners. Another one is

*Fu Jou*, the drawing of mystical pictures, and the writing or recital of mystical invocations for the purpose of invoking a response from the subtle realm of the universe..."

...which is apparently what I was practicing. A few of the insight images presented themselves to me in a sort of completeness, needing no development of sketches, color studies or preliminary layouts; but they were the exceptions. The great majority of the illustrations took days, even months to mature from concept to delineation. The use of colored pencils proved to be an effective tool, in allowing rapid reworking of ideas, and creating a wide, yet coordinated pallet of colors. Working at desktop scale, a pencil's ability to easily create fine detail was also beneficial.

Although the insight images were carefully crafted, intuitive inspiration did play a part in each stage of creating them: notably in feeling my way toward each underlying vision; but also in validating a sense of completion when everything worked artistically, as well as conceptually; and in the opposite way, when intuition demanded a reworking of some. Knowing when to stop drawing (and thinking!) also became an intuitive skill.

I should note here that I am, and always will be, indebted to the multitude of sinologists, linguists and other *Yi* scholars, whose academic work made my life-long journey into the *Yi* more accessible. However, my interest in the *Yi* has always been limited to intuitive divination and an aesthetic appreciation of its ideas and metaphors. Yet, as these *Fundamental Aspects of Change* coalesced and defined themselves, they drew my interest more strongly with each new realization. And they have never lost their sense of primitive enlightenment, continuing to open wider vistas of context, meaning and application. Put in perspective, this discovery should be seen as the thoughts of a layman, albeit a lifelong student of the *Yijing*, and a discovery informed by persistent and extensive intuitive practice.

The first ancient Commentary citation, the first component of *The Fundamental Aspects*, addresses hexagram structure. It describes six line hexagrams as originating from three modalities, derived from the nature of three types of awareness, known in Chinese as *sancai*: Earthly, Human and Heavenly. The following text, from Chapter 1, Section 2 of the *Zuozhuan*, is translated by Iulian Shchutskii in *Researches on the I Ching*, his exploration of, among other things, the origins of the *Yijing*:

In antiquity when the sages originated [the study of] the Changes, they intended to conform to the laws of the essence of [man and his] fate. And thus they established the Way of Heaven: Dark and



Light; they established the Way of Earth: Pliability and Rigidity; they established the Way of Man: Love and Duty. They combined these three potentials and doubled them. For this reason in the *Book of Changes* six lines comprise a hexagram, and in it dark and light are divided, and pliability and rigidity alternate. Thus in the *Book of Changes*, six positions make up an entire unit.

Shchutskii defines these three modalities as *potentials* within each hexagram. And in keeping with the enigmatic style of the *Yi*, the citation quoted above does not indicate whether the doubling of these *potentials* occurs as three couplets or as two trigrams. I point this out, because the use of trigrams, which are the upper three lines and the lower three lines in each hexagram, is the commonly accepted approach to *Yijing* interpretation, (although there is no documented evidence of trigrams being used before the seventh century BCE.) My intuition convinced me that the doubling mentioned in the *Zuozhuan* actually meant three layers of two lines each: lower, middle and upper layers of *potential*. That is the same conclusion Richard Wilhelm reaches in his seminal translation of the *Yijing*. In his commentary on Chapter I, Section 2 of the *Zuozhuan*, Wilhelm states: “The two lowest places are those of earth, the third and fourth are those of man, and the two at the top are those of heaven....”

The second ancient interpretive citation, integral to this new methodology, is from the *Xicizhuan* Commentary; it defines the four possible combinations of solid and broken lines as the four *Primal Images*. Traditionally, these two-line glyphs have been identified with a cycle of phases, principally the four seasons, as well as the phases of our lives, and other cyclical phenomenon. As with the bottom-to-top movement of lines within hexagrams and trigrams, this sequence of *Primal Images* invite change from their bottom lines, which move upward to form each successive *Primal Image*.



Old Yang



Young Yin



Old Yin



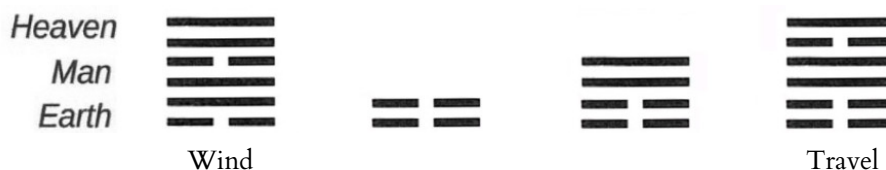
Young Yang

Wilhelm, in his comments (see below), seems to view these *Primal Images* as simply the precursors of trigrams. But I believe this conclusion does them short service, their importance in the early formation of the *Yijing* being more profound. In Chapter XI, Sections 5 and 9 of the same *Xicizhuan* Commentary, Wilhelm touches on the *Primal Images*, elements that are at the heart of the *Fundamental Aspects of Change*, as well as on the *Yijing's* early structural nature:

5. Therefore there is in the Changes the Great Primal Beginning. This generates the two primary forces. The two primary forces generate the four images. The four images generate the eight trigrams.
9. In the Changes there are images, in order to reveal; there are judgments appended in order to interpret; good fortune and misfortune are determined, in order to decide.

Oddly, Richard Wilhelm then notes that he has eliminated the word “four” from Section 9, and provides a comment about his rationale for this: “The text says ‘four’ images; this is carried over *by error* from Section 5.” Wilhelm goes on, “Here ‘images’ means the eight trigrams, which shows *situations* in their interrelation.” (Bold italics added by me for emphasis.) However, it seems to me that the phrase “*four images*” stated in the text of the *Xicizhuan* is certainly not “*by error*”, but in fact describes exactly what the *Primal Images* might aspire to do, which is to “*reveal*” the relative, often changing nature of the three *potentials*, or energy layers these *Primal Images* occupy within each Change.

The essence of *The Fundamental Aspects* methodology is the dynamic interaction between these two ancient, commendatory concepts. Insights from the *Fundamental Aspects* have meaning for both divination and wisdom study, as do trigram-specific interpretations, although the existential nature of each system is different. From my experience, these *Fundamental Aspects* seem more elemental, and it appears that when examined in detail, a system whose context is more closely aligned to the impersonal, non-judgmental world view of the *Yijing's* Basic Text.



All three *Primal Images*, change to form each subsequent hexagram within the *Fundamental Aspect* groups, in a continuous, self contained cycle.

When hexagrams change in this way, groups of four cyclical, self contained Changes are formed. In this interpretive system, all three *Primal Images*, in any given hexagram, will each change from *old yang* to *young yin*, to *old yin*, to *young yang* and back to *old yang*, successively and cyclically. When this system of transformation is arranged in a matrix, the complexity of the arrangement displays connotations of *time* and *place*; (see below). Each *Aspect* group shares a theme that suggests an over-arching aspect of human nature, 'Resilience', 'Stimulation', 'Understanding', etc. But although these themes are easily identifiable, parsing the arrangement of *Primal Images* within a hexagram's three *potentials* can be challenging. Those particular insights, emanating from the interaction of all three *Images* and *potentials*, are typically defined by energetics, as opposed to the inherent circumstantiality in using trigrams, with their emphasis on symbolic associations. This particular difficulty in framing metaphysical content, represents a universal characteristic of all *Yijing* interpretation systems, regardless of how symbol oriented, conceptual or metaphorical their specific approaches are. Thus, a familiar conclusion reached by commentators throughout civilization, has been the *Yi's* enigmatic underlying nature.

In *Fundamental Aspects* methodology, a primitive sense of four-dimensional *time-space* reality emerges from the interaction between the three layers of *potential* and the four *Primal Images*. On a conceptual level, a flow of *potential* energies alludes to the web of *time* or context, while the four *Primal Images* imply situation-specific imagery, reflecting *space*, or *place* identification. However, the *Fundamental Aspects* also offer a more accessible type of interpretation, more familiar to modern sensibilities, one based simply on the position of each hexagram within its cyclical *Aspect* group.

My own, (somewhat simplified,) primary characteristics of the four *Primal Images* are as: Essential, Conceptual, Spiritual: *old yang*; Expansive, Expressive, Growing: *young yin*; Manifest, Material, Wide-ranging: *old yin*; and Contracting, Internalized, Veiled: *young yang*. In antiquity, perhaps each *Primal Image* was also associated with a variety of deities and spirits connected with various rituals, for instance, the opening of the fields in spring and the spirits associated with those rituals.

Let me use hexagram fifty, *Ding*, The Cauldron, and hexagram twenty nine, *Kan*, River, (or Double Pitfall, Danger) as two examples, demonstrating my approach to understanding the energetic interaction between *Primal Images* and *potentials* within hexagrams. First, meanings develop separately from each of the three *Image/potential* combinations, as they relate to a specific inquiry; in addition, meanings develop from the metaphysical interaction of all three energy layers, when considered holistically; and through wisdom study, identifiable, common characteristics emerge for each of the twelve possible combinations. This complex approach benefits from a metaphysical frame of mind, focused on an unfolding process, represented by the inquiry.

*Ding*, The Cauldron, has a lower Earthly *Image* of *young yin* (expansive); its central Human *Image* is *old yang* (conceptual); and its top, Heavenly *Image* is *young yin* (again expansive): this is a *time* when both the material aspect of existence and its heavenly counterpart are expanding. Human awareness is focused on spirituality, having the *potential* to form an essential connection to expressive energies emanating from above and below, from what could be one's ancestors and one's environment. These three *potentials* also compliment one another holistically, implying an auspicious moment in *time*; while on a conceptual level, a spiritual enhancement of self-realization.

*Kan*, River or Danger, is composed of a lower, Earthly *Image* of *young yin* (growing or expansive);

a Human *Image* of *old yin* (fully present and open-hearted); and an upper, Heavenly *image* of *young yang* (contracting or hidden); a *time* when both the environmental and spiritual aspects of existence are in flux, and human *potential* is flexibly engaged; in addition, the inevitable movement of environmental and spiritual change is toward oppositional energies. Successfully navigating these dynamics, without forceful intervention, could depend on open-heartedness, (two open lines in the center). Earthly and Heavenly *potentials* are moving in opposite directions, implying imbalance; becoming overwhelmed and off balance is dangerous. The upper layer of *potential* has force, but its nature remains mysterious, while the lower *potential* has vitality, but remains elusive. Only a forthright awareness of this dynamic process, and one's place within it, can insure security, much as a river boatman needs to be ever aware of the water's changing conditions. I am reminded of a famous poet's admonition: 'The best way around, is through'.

These two examples of hexagram interpretation, based on how *Primal Images* occupy the three strata of hexagram *potentials*, demonstrate the unorthodox perspective needed to form a metaphysical narrative of change. These emerging notions are unfamiliar territory for oracle response interpretation, but offer an accessible, coherent approach for wisdom study. Another way to develop metaphysical insight, (more aligned with modern sensibilities and divination in general), reflects the position that each hexagram occupies within its designated *Aspect* group; (see four-page matrix below). Note that in this matrix, the cycle represented by the four *Primal Images* has been applied to the four successive hexagrams in each group; for example, *Lin*, Approach occupies the third, or fully manifest position in the *Aspect* group Orientation, a relationship identifiable by the Change's forward-facing intention and wide-ranging implications.


The most direct matrix interpretations reflect the position of each hexagram within its *Aspect* group. Using the Orientation *Aspect* group as an example: *Dun*, Withdrawal (away-facing) represents the essence of Orientation; *Shi He*, Biting Through shows its expressive growth (outward-facing); *Lin*, Approach (forward-facing) is the full manifestation of Orientation; while *Jing*, The Well (inward-facing) suggests directing our Orientation toward the source of things.

This matrix of *Fundamental Aspects* presents one other straightforward way of interpreting *Yijing* oracle responses, in the interrelationship of *primary* and *related* Changes received as oracle responses. It should be noted that, with this interpretive system, successful inquiries will always benefit from a holistic approach: seeking insight and a deeper understanding of the nature of change, and oneself, not perfunctory advice. Putting those received insights into perspective, relating them to a specific inquiry and using them for decision-making, are best seen as the responsibility of the inquirer.

A typical inquiry and *Fundamental Aspect* response interpretation might proceed like this: pose an inquiry that is specific, yet holistic in nature, (such as "What is the potential in my relationship with my new horse?"); then decipher the energetic implied in the *primary* response hexagram, based solely on its matrix position in *time* and *space*, for instance, if the *Yi*'s response is *Gu*, Degeneration, (or Repair Decay,) it's nature is expansive Sincerity; (thus, "Repairing decay benefits from the growth of sincerity.") Second, attempt to parse the energetics at work within the Change's *potentials*: in *Gu* the material aspect of the *time* is expansive; human consciousness is *firm* within and *flexible* outwardly, (benefiting from reflection and self-searching); while spiritual energies are also expanding. Importantly, the mantic statement of "great success" mentioned in the *judgment* aligns with an energetic dynamic of *expansion-contraction-expansion*.



Degeneration



Rising

In this example, if the top, solid line is a changing one, that and the *related* hexagram need to be considered next. Start by examining the holistic relationship between the *related* Change, in this case *Sheng*, Rising and *Gu*, the *primary* Change. Rising represents a *time* when Harmony, (its *Fundamental Aspect* group,) is fully manifest. Then examine the

line text for 18/6, the changing line. In this case, both healing forces – spirituality and harmony – achieve vital *potential*, by virtue of this changing line, and this is reinforced by the line text for 18/6: “He does not serve kings and princes, sets himself higher goals.” On a metaphysical level, one meaningful response to this inquiry would be: “Sincerity in repairing this particular decay has success, and the potential to achieve harmonious stability.” (Stability is implied in this example by the unchanging nature of both Earthly and Human *potentials*.)

The sixteen names I’ve chosen for these *Fundamental Aspects* reflect my own understanding of the *Yijing*, and are unavoidably born of the times and culture we live in. More importantly, (as is true of the structure of hexagrams, and of the *Yijing* itself), the primary meaning of this system resides in its architecture, which reflects metaphysical priorities of *time* and *place*; the significance of its nomenclature and all specific interpretations constitute secondary layers of meaning. An important, related sub-structure of the *Aspect* matrix is each hexagram’s position within its *Aspect* group. Early in the development of the *Fundamental Aspects*, this ordering established itself intuitively, with the spontaneous selection of the first, or *essential* hexagrams in each *Aspect* group. Determining the validity of these hexagram positions has taken time, due to the fact that many Changes are associated today with different concepts than they were in Middle Antiquity. However, after carefully exploring each hexagram’s root characters, these concepts seem consistent with their *time* and *place* relationships within the matrix.

As I completed the insight images, I was left with an understanding of how traditional martial arts and visual creativity are formed from the same ground. Zen (and *Chan*) sensibilities, specifically their approach to creativity, were an important influence on the intuitive process I used to create the sixty-four images. Zen masters of every sect recognized a connection between Zen enlightenment and the *Yi*’s concept of the fully-realized person, as well as to the *Yijing*’s role as a foundation of Daoist practice. Zen samurai master *Odagiri Ichuin*, speaks of a principle existing beyond life and death, which he called Heavenly Reason. *Ichuin* identified this principle with the four ancient mantic pronouncements from the *Yijing*: *yuan*, *heng*, *li* and *chen*, for which the customary translations are: sublime, success, furthering and perseverance, (although the alternate translations I prefer are: originate, develop, perfect and consummate, taken from Thomas Cleary’s translation of *Cheng Yi’s I Ching, the Tao of Organization*.) Zen master *Ichuin* believed these four mantic virtues constituted true human nature, and when perfected to an enlightened level, promoted total freedom of being.

After many pleasant hours reflecting on the proto-Zen character of the *Yijing*, and immersing myself in Zen poetry, I appended a poem to each insight image – Zen poems that reflect some aspect of each Change. Timeless as they are, for me the Changes engender metaphysical connections similar to the sensibilities of many ancient Zen poets: the bittersweet sense of a more profound, lost past, experienced by *Bao Juyi*; an essential foundation of awakened *Chan* mentality, alluded to by *Han Shan*; and the enlightenment of a life lived deep in the flow of natural forces, as practiced by poets like *Xie Lingyun* are only a few examples of the *Yi*’s inspirational effect on the eloquence of *Chan* poetry. By all accounts of *Yijing* scholars, reading the Basic Text in the original, primitive characters, in itself generates a similar, Zen-like aesthetic experience, the *Zhouyi*’s poetic beauty clearly evident.

Discoursing on Zen and the arts, in particular intuitive creativity, is problematic; words strain to encompass a meaningful perspective of consciousness-drawing-closer to metaphysical reality. However, convincing examples of this cosmic aspect of creativity seem to be evident in some of the Changes. For instance, *Zhen*, The Arousing or Thunder, has root characters, (described by Stephen Karcher, in his *Total I Ching*), that indicate *rain* and *cutting through*. In the *Yi*, *rain* is associated with union of firm and yielding and good fortune, while *cutting through* implies decisive movement. Holistically, *Zhen*’s primitive meaning appears to be an awakening of the higher mind, not the nature-centered symbol (of thunder) later associated with its component trigram.

If one has experienced the visceral shock of intuitively knowing something without any rational explanation, it probably resembles the primitive meaning of *Zhen*. Similar implications apply to *Wu Wang*, No Error or The Unexpected. This Change describes an elusive level consciousness, able to act spontaneously yet correctly, close to the Zen state of *no mind*. *Takuin*, Zen monk and teacher, never tired of expanding on the doctrine of emptiness, which is the metaphysics of *mushin no shin* (mind of no-mind). But No Error also cautions us to recognize and respect the limit of this enigmatic flow of intuitive mentality, at the risk of losing our way. As noted above, the relationship between artistic creativity and martial arts becomes obvious when delving into either discipline.

Often, as I worked on the insight images, I wondered, “Am I truly visualizing something from a primordial level of my unconscious? Or are these images merely aesthetic manipulation, simply a keen affinity for cultural relevance?” But in reality, there exists no identifiable division between so-called ‘true’ intuitive art and ‘merely’ stream of consciousness art; aesthetically my concerns were misleading. An enlightened solution to my doubts, as DT Suzuki noted in his seminal *Zen and Japanese Culture*, is the profound nature of Zen non-judgmental awareness:

‘Intuition’ has various shades of meaning. Ontologically speaking, its most fundamental quality is to come directly in touch with Reality...

The experience the human mind has when it is identified with the totality of things...is the most primary feeling which lies at the basis of every form of psychic functioning we are capable of.

Oliver Sacks, an eminent neurologist and explorer of human nature, reached the same type of conclusions DT Suzuki did. Sacks studied unconscious activity scientifically on several levels: emotive, sympathetic, ‘cognitive’ as well as the many elusive notions of creativity. In his essay, *The Creative Self* he notes:

Creativity involves not only years of conscious preparation and training, but unconscious preparation as well. This incubation period is essential to allow the subconscious assimilation and incorporation of one’s influences and sources, to reorganize and synthesize them into something of one’s own...

It does not seem surprising then, that the Changes needed fifty years to unconsciously incubate in my mind, in a way that precipitated an artistic response, a lengthy process demanded by the *Yijing*’s overwhelming basis in underlying reality. And given my life-long interest in intuitive interpretation of oracle responses, it seems natural that the insights that emerged from the *Fundamental Aspects* are useful approaches for divination. Seen from the perspective of evolutionary philosophy, the dynamics of the *Fundamental Aspects* point to the *Yijing*’s defining character, as an ever-changing synergy between Meaning and Purpose; not only in the *Yi*’s beautifully formulated belief systems, but in its own transformative, organic existence throughout civilization. The Book’s own life has been a continuum of seemingly endless meanings and purposes.

These speculations suggest that the ancient sages may have been exploring processes, not situations, which are the generally accepted focus of *Yijing* use today. This *Fundamental Aspect* methodology is also consistent with the numinous orientation that underpins so much of Asian intellectual development. Perhaps these enlightened perceptions, gathering in the minds of *Western Zhou* sages, lay so far beyond proto-Chinese language that they required an abstraction (six lines) to express them, and written words applied systematically only later; and later still, its geometric imagery was systematized through the use of trigrams. It is also worth considering what the justification for such an epic creative undertaking might have been: deep compassion for humanity; a very early appreciation of the power of ideas; a desire to better master circumstances? Or simply to elicit responses from the subtle realm of the cosmos...?

Seen in this metaphysical context, there is something uniquely beautiful about the *Yijing*, a kind of conceptual artistry, woven from, yet beyond language, ideas or images. Clearly infused with joyousness, and the unfolding discovery of new human potentials, it graciously expanded what could be perceived by a people who were otherwise limited by the rigors of feudal existence.

Psychologically, the tapestry of themes identified by the root characters of the sixty-four Change *titles*, as well as the narratives developed by its three-hundred eighty-six *line texts*, reflect an almost Zen-like yearning for reality, as well as an emotional acceptance of human nature. Incredibly, the *Yi's* ancient text has survived its passage through the ages to be here with us; a remarkably mysterious work of primitive enlightenment, forever transforming itself into relevant, artful wisdom.


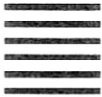






































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







































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*Sixteen Fundamental Aspects of Change*

	<i>Resilience</i>	<i>Stimulation</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Subtlety</i>
Conceptual Spiritual Essential 	 The Creative	 Wind	 Fire	 Lake
Expansive Expressive Becoming 	 Unresolved	 Travel	 Marrying a Young Woman	 Dispersal
Manifest Inclusive Full 	 The Receptive	 Thunder	 River	 Mountain
Contracting Hidden Diminishing 	 Resolved	 Discipline	 Gradual Progress	 The Mandate of Heaven
	<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Harmony</i>	<i>Sincerity</i>
Conceptual Spiritual Essential 	 Obstruction	 Withdrawal	 No Error	 Sincerity in the Center
Expansive Expressive Becoming 	 Nourishment	 Biting Through	 Reduction	 Degeneration
Manifest Inclusive Full 	 Tranquility	 Approach	 Rising	 Small Excess
Contracting Hidden Diminishing 	 Great Undertaking	 The Well	 Influence	 Following

Sixteen Fundamental Aspects of Change				
	Intention	Reflection	Strategy	Courage
Conceptual Spiritual Essential  old yang	 Great Potential	 Great Power	 Meeting	 Association with Others
Expansive Expressive Becoming  young yin	 Duration	 Exhaustion	 Advancing	 Disharmony
Manifest Inclusive Full  old yin	 Gathering	 Contemplation	 Returning	 The Army
Contracting Hidden Diminishing  young yang	 Increase	 Adornment	 Waiting	 Halted
	Perseverance	Cooperation	Attainment	Disintegration
Conceptual Spiritual Essential  old yang	 Treading	 Small Potential	 Great Possession	 Removing
Expansive Expressive Becoming  young yin	 Immaturity	 The Cauldron	 Solution	 Contending
Manifest Inclusive Full  old yin	 Humility	 Enthusiasm	 Closeness	 Undermining
Contracting Hidden Diminishing  young yang	 Revolution	 Emerging	 The Clan	 Darkening of Illumination

# Pin as a Value Matrix in Chinese Aesthetics

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XIONGBO SHI

**Abstract:** The goal of this paper is to discuss an important paradigm in Chinese artistic evaluation, one which can be identified as an efficacious framework, the gradation (*pin*) of both Chinese artists and their artworks. The four common categories (or four *pin*) in the ranking system – *shen* (divine or inspired), *miao* (marvellous), *neng* (competent), and *yi* (unconstrained) – are discussed in their original contexts. I contend that the stability within the evaluative classes contributes to the long-lasting efficacy of the *pin* system. Elaborating on this classification system, I suggest that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, which deserves to be incorporated into Western aesthetic discussions of comparative judgment of the value of art.

**Keywords:** Chinese aesthetics, *pin*, artistic value, value matrix

The goal of this paper is to discuss an important paradigm in Chinese artistic evaluation, one which can be identified as an efficacious framework, the gradation (*pin*) of both Chinese artists and their artworks. The four common categories (or four *pin*) in the ranking system – *shen* (divine or inspired), *miao* (marvellous), *neng* (competent), and *yi* (unconstrained) – are discussed in their original contexts. I contend that the stability within the evaluative classes contributes to the long-lasting efficacy of the *pin* system. Elaborating on this classification system, I suggest that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, which deserves to be incorporated into Western aesthetic discussions of comparative judgment of the value of art.

## 1. *Pin* and its Early Use in Art Criticism

As the core term that holds up this evaluative framework, *pin* has two basic meanings. Firstly, it is a way of grouping things that is widely employed in Chinese people's classification of things. The Southern Song scholar Hong Zun (1120–1174), for example, classified coins into nine types (*pin*); the Qing dynasty ink maker Cao Sugong (1615–1689) categorized the ink sticks he made into eighteen groups (*pin*). In pre-modern Chinese texts, classifications like these are ubiquitous – one can find the classifications (*pin*) of flowers, teas, wines, incense materials, and other objects. Implied in every classification is an understanding, and then an appraisal, of that specific area. Quoting a Chinese passage that divides animals into fourteen groups, Michel Foucault said in the preface to *The Order of Things* that it demonstrates the “exotic charm of another system of thought” (Foucault 2002: xvi). Secondly, *pin* refers to the rank of things, indicating a degree or grade of excellence. This aspect of *pin* is closely related to the first aspect of classification; the difference lies in the fact that *pin* as a classification does not designate a hierarchy.

When the Southern dynasty scholar Yu Jianwu (487–551) in his *Shu pin* (Gradings of Calligraphers) classified 123 calligraphers from the Han to Liang dynasties into nine degrees – including in order upper-upper, upper-middle, upper-lower, middle-upper, and so on – it is apparent that Yu made a value judgement of the calligraphers. Before discussing the characteristics of Yu's evaluation, I would like to start with the background to this first work to apply *pin* theory in calligraphy criticism.

Calligraphy criticism is not the only art that developed a system of grading. In Yu's time, as John Timothy Wixted observed, “classification in the arts became the vogue” (Wixted 1983:

228). Other well-known examples are Zhong Rong's (469–518) *Shi pin* (Gradings of Poets) and Xie He's (act. 500–535) *Gu hua pin lu* (Old Records of Gradings of Painters). It is generally believed that the Chinese tradition of grading artists into different ranks owes much to the earlier nine-rank system, a civil service nomination system that assigned officials to nine ranks based on their talents, achievements, and abilities. The nine-rank system was used in the Three Kingdoms period (220–280) but was replaced by the imperial examination system in the Sui dynasty (581–618);<sup>1</sup> the period in between witnessed the first phase of evolution of Chinese art theory. Most of these early art theorists were scholars in the officialdom, thus it is easily understandable that they would tend to employ the classification schemes in the language of the arts as well as in the political administration.

At first glance, the early Chinese texts on the classification of the arts are not much different to earlier characterological texts: they all present short evaluative passages of individual artists. In Yu's *Shu pin*, for example, he started with directly writing down the names of three calligraphers who were ranked in the highest *pin* (degree, class) of upper-upper (*shang zhi shang*) – Zhang Zhi, Zhong You, and Wang Xizhi – and then providing an evaluative description of them. And next he went on to five other calligraphers who fell under the second highest degree of upper-middle (*Shang zhi zhong*), and so on. Other such works, Xie He's *Gu hua pin lu* for instance, also conformed to the same layout. But, by closely reading the descriptions of individual calligraphers in *Shu pin*, one will find that the traits Yu Jianwu focused on are different from earlier characterological texts such as Liu Yiqing's (403–444) *Shishuo xinyu* (A New Account of the Tales of the World). Critics in the characterological tradition, as Wixted noticed, tended to characterize people “in a few well-chosen, preferably abstruse and poetic words” such as *qi* (spirit), *feng* (air; temper), and *qing* (pure; spotless in conduct) (Wixted 1983: 232). In *Shu pin*, however, Yu was primarily concerned with the calligraphic practice of the calligraphers he chose. Comparing the three calligraphers from the upper-upper class, he wrote that:

Zhang Zhi stands first in *gongfu* (technical skill), and in *tianran* (heavenly spontaneity) he comes second; Zhong You stands first in *tianran*, and in *gongfu* he comes second. In *gongfu*, Wang Xizhi does not reach Zhang, but in *tianran* he surpassed him; in *tianran*, Wang does not reach Zhong, but in *gongfu* he surpassed him. (Huang 1979: 87)

The antithesis of *tianran* and *gongfu*, first used by Wang Sengqian (426–485) in *Lunshu* (On Calligraphy), is employed here as Yu's evaluative criteria.<sup>2</sup> Citing this passage, I want to demonstrate that, though Yu's *Shu pin* seems to follow the format of the texts in the characterological tradition, his discussion of the calligraphers tends to focus on their calligraphic practice and achievements rather than “characterizations.” Thus, on the surface, *Shu pin* seems to be just another work on personality appraisal (*renwu pinzhao*), but Yu's classification does in fact imply a certain artistic ground. In addition to this, it needs to be pointed out that throughout the whole *Shu pin*, there is no mention of any actual calligraphic work. That is, when Yu ranked Wang Xianzhi (344–386) in the upper-middle class, he made a holistic evaluation of Wang Xianzhi's calligraphic practice and his overall style.

## 2. Categories of Ranking

Yu Jianwu's three-degree classification – *shang* (upper), *zhong* (middle), *xia* (lower) – developed in the Tang dynasty (618–907) into a four-degree ranking system that employed specific names, for example, *shen* (divine or inspired), *miao* (marvellous), *neng* (competent), and *yi* (unconstrained). In *Shupin hou* (Gradings of Calligraphers Continuation), the early Tang artist-official Li Sizhen (?–696) followed Yu's model, but he added a new “unconstrained” or *yi* class of calligraphers who belonged to “a group beyond classification” (Vinograd 2016: 256). In the history of Chinese art criticism, this was the first time a critic used a specific category to identify a group of artists, and

it clearly influenced succeeding critics. A few decades after Li's *Shupin hou*, Zhang Huaiguan's (act. 713–741) *Shuduan* (Judgements on Calligraphers) pioneered the use of the tripartite scheme – *shen*, *miao*, and *neng* – to rank calligraphers. A unique feature of *Shuduan* is that Zhang started to distinguish various calligraphic scripts (such as regular, seal, and cursive) in the evaluative classification of a calligrapher. That is to say, the various scripts of the same calligrapher, based on their respective degrees of excellence, might be allocated to different classes.

It is generally believed that Zhang's tripartite scheme matches Yu's three-degree classification system. As Yolaine Escande explained:

there is a correspondence between the higher degree, *shang*, and the class called *shen* 神 (divine, inspired), between the average degree, *zhong*, and the *miao* 妙 (marvelous) class, and last between the lowest degree, *xia*, and the *neng* 能 (competent, talented) class...[Zhang's] gradings...are implicitly linked to traditional degree rankings (*shang*, *zhong*, *xia*). (Escande 2014: 150)

In fact, Zhang's three evaluative categories were nothing new in Tang art discourse. During the Six Dynasties, the aesthetic category of *shen*, for example, had already been extensively used in “discussions on authorial qualities, the creative process, and the principles of aesthetic judgment” (Cai 2004: 310–311). Besides, as all of the three terms are mentioned in Yu Jianwu's *Shu pin*, it can be assumed that Zhang Huaiguan was inspired by Yu's work to introduce the new evaluative tripartite system.

Shortly afterward, Zhang's tripartite scheme of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, along with Li Sizhen's *yi*, was adopted and integrated by other art critics. In the Preface to *Tangchao minghua lu* (Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty), a text that ranks leading Tang painters and records their biographies, Zhu Jingxuan (act. 840–846) wrote that:

According to Zhang Huaiguan, calligraphy should be classified in three categories, i.e. *shen*, *miao*, and *neng*, and in each of these he distinguishes a superior, a middle and an inferior degree. Those outside the three categories have no method at all. But there is also the *yi* class (or category) which may be characterized either as excellent or as vile (high or low). (Sirén 1963: 34)

In Zhu Jingxuan's classification, the *yi* class of painters is added at the very end after the other three classes. In the early eleventh-century text *yizhou minghua lu* (Records of Famous Painters in Yizhou), however, Huang Xiufu (fl. 1006) ranked the *yi* class above the other three. This change in the status of *yi* or the unconstrained category, according to Vinograd, “may have been influenced by regional tastes, by personal preference for unconventional qualities, or by changes in the social status of painters” (Vinograd 2016: 256). Regardless of the ranking of *yi*, the tripartite ranking scheme of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, or the four-category scheme that includes *yi*, has become an important paradigm in Chinese art discourse since the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Accordingly, critical texts that employ such evaluative categories and rankings form a unique genre in Chinese art criticism. To give a few more examples, the Northern Song treatise *Xu Shuduan* (Judgements on Calligraphers Continuation), composed by Zhu Changwen (1039–1098), followed Zhang Huaiguan's tripartite evaluative model. The Ming dynasty artist Wang Zhideng's (1535–1612) *Wujun danqing zhi* (Record of the Painters of Suzhou) employed the four-degree classification of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, and *yi*. Up until the Qing dynasty, when Bao Shichen (1775–1855) classified Qing dynasty calligraphers, his practice still applied such a traditional ranking system.

One might ask, why did this system develop and last for such a long time? I think this question can be examined from two perspectives. On one hand, the above-mentioned classifying schemes do play an active role in the pre-modern Chinese art world. As Vinograd well summarized, “such systems fulfill two major functions: *organizing* the diversity of information about artistic production, and guiding *assessment* of cultural, critical, and economic value” (ibid, p. 254). On the other hand, I contend that the stability within the evaluative classes or categories (*shen*, *miao*, *neng*, and

*yi*) contributes to the system's long-lasting efficacy. When the four-category classification first took shape during the end of Tang and the beginning of Northern Song, each of the four classes had been designated, implicitly or explicitly, its own stipulation. The distinction between the ranks is clearly drawn, and it is the tension created by the differences in degrees of excellence that maintains the operation of such a system.

It is thus necessary to further discuss the meanings of the four classes and their distinctions as understood by Chinese art critics. Zhang Huaiguan, the initiator of the three-class system of the Divine, Excellent, and Competent, wrote of the divergence between them in *Shudian*:

*Miao* aspires to *shen*; but one who walks cannot gallop. *Neng* hopes to become *miao*, but follows the rules excessively. (Escande 2014: 163)

Zhang's brief remarks make it evident that the three categories indicate "different degrees of value or quality" (*ibid*). In addition, readers obtain a vague idea that the calligraphers he ranked in the *neng* class cling slavishly to the calligraphic techniques, which may impede their movement to the higher class of *miao*. But beside that, one can hardly grasp the connotations of the other two categories.

Dou Meng (act. 742–755), a Tang scholar-official and a contemporary of Zhang Huaiguan, realizing that the ambiguities in key artistic terms caused difficulties in understanding texts on calligraphy, endeavored to define the commonly used aesthetic terms in his *Shu shu fu* (Rhapsody to Chinese Calligraphy). In Dou's book, we read that:

*Shen*: it can not be reached intentionally, but can be conceived.

*Miao*: having a multitude of shades and savors.

*Neng*: able to master all scripts.

*Yi*: being carefree and having no fixed direction.<sup>3</sup>

Somewhat obscure, Dou Meng's definitions aid us in understanding the meanings of the categories as they were used in Tang art discourse. The difference between the highest degree of *shen* and the lowest of *neng* is obvious: the Competent (*neng*) calligraphers only reach the level of proficiency in techniques, since to achieve the Inspired (*shen*), as Chiang Yee said, requires "years of practice" as well as "aesthetic insight and innate artistic power" on the part of the calligrapher (Chiang 1973: 223–224). The class of *miao* can be understood as the intermediate level between *shen* and *neng*. The last category, *yi*, is a rather slippery and contentious one in Chinese art criticism. It is difficult to differentiate *yi* from *shen*; occasionally, *yi* is ranked above *shen*, but more often it is used independently of the other three degrees. In principle, *yi* is employed to designate Chinese artists who do not hold to conventional rules or patterns. As Susan Nelson concisely described it, "*yi* presumed the artist's complete unpredictability and uniqueness, his disengagement from the genealogies of art history" (Nelson 1983: 410).<sup>4</sup>

### 3. *Pin* as Value Matrix

Elaborating on the Chinese art classification system, I suggest that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, by means of which Chinese scholars, connoisseurs, and art critics assess and rank the cultural, economic, and aesthetic values of different types of paintings and calligraphic works, if not all artworks. Most likely, such a Chinese theory of *pin* or evaluative classification would captivate Western aestheticians like Monroe Beardsley and Nelson Goodman, who, at one time or another, have entertained the idea of comparing or ranking the values of different artworks.<sup>5</sup> As George Dickie said:

If the value of every work could be compared to the value of every other work, then all existing works could be envisaged as ranked in a hierarchical value matrix. We could then assign *specific* values to artworks, saying that those works at the top of the envisaged matrix are *excellent* works, those in the middle are *good* works, those at the bottom are *bad* works, and so on. (Dickie 1998: 131)



It is hard not to match the degrees of *excellent* and *good* with the categories of *shen* and *miao* in the Chinese ranking scheme, and it appears that the theory of *pin* or classification could provide the desired matrix. However, an immediate refutation of such an equivalence is that the focus of the evaluation in the Chinese theory of *pin* is the artists themselves, while the hierarchical matrix imagined by the Western art theorists would be used to compare and rank the values of artworks as artworks. From the sixth-century Yu Jianwu's *Shu pin* to the eleventh-century Zhu Changwen's *Xu shuduan*, as I mentioned previously, texts in the tradition of calligraphic classification rank the calligraphers, not any actual calligraphic work. A few Western sinologists also notice the difference between these kinds of evaluation. Escande, for example, wrote that:

The problem of objective evaluation, as conceptualized and aspired to in Europe, is avoided... Chinese art theory does indeed involve an esthetic reflection on evaluation, but its aim differs from that of Western art theory in that it focuses on the subject and not the object. (Escande 2014: 161, 165)

Escande's remarks can be countered from two perspectives. First, when early art critics such as Yu Jianwu classified the calligraphers, they *did* pay attention to the calligraphers' artistic practice and overall calligraphic style. This is even more manifest when Zhang Huaiguan subdivided the three classes – the Inspired, the Marvellous, and the Competent – into various calligraphic scripts.

Second, a more persuasive response, as made in an article by Richard Vinograd, is that the Chinese evaluative classification has evolved “over time to focus on works of art as the objects of evaluation” (Vinograd 2016: 256). It is likely that the shift originated in the connoisseurial literature of around the twelfth century. At and after that time, as Vinograd observed, ranking categories like *shen* (inspired) and *miao* (excellent) “might appear unsystematically as terms of praise in colophons or poems about painting [and calligraphy]” (ibid, p. 257). In a colophon to Dong Yuan's (act. 934–962) *Shankou daidu tu* (Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of the Mountains), the Yuan painter and official connoisseur Ke Jiushi (1290–1343) identified the work presented as an authentic work from Dong and evaluated it as a real “divine piece” (*shen-pin*). This was not the first time the ranking categories were used for an actual work. In a colophon to the Northern Song long scroll *Qingming shanghe tu* (Along the River during the Qingming Festival), the Jin dynasty scholar Zhang Zhu (fl. 1186) noted that this scroll should be stored as a divine-class (*shen-pin*) artwork.

During the Ming dynasty, the formal ranking systems within a few art forms – especially painting and calligraphy – began to focus solely on the artworks. For example, in *Minghua shenpin mu* (A Catalogue of Famous Paintings Ranked in the Shen Class) and *Fatie shenpin mu* (A Catalogue of Shen--class Calligraphic Works), both produced by the Ming scholar-official Yang Shen (1488–1559), specific works of paintings and calligraphy become the focus of evaluation. In Yang's catalogue, every work was designated a title, followed occasionally by the artist's name, or the location of the work, or nothing. Under a few paintings and calligraphic works, Yang noted that the artist was unknown. I believe that Yang Shen's work marks an important turn in evaluative texts on Chinese painting and calligraphy because it signals when evaluative classification schemes started to rank artworks. When Yang determined to make a list of the best or the Divine works extant in his day, his primary concern was not the calligraphers or painters, their deeds or career achievements, but rather the artistic qualities as manifested in their specific artworks. When Yang ranked anonymous works such as *Toulao kannian tie* (Notes Written in the Declining Old Years) and *Xuetan hanyan tu* (Snow Shore and Cold Swallows) in the Inspired class, there is no denying the fact that he made a comparatively disinterested value judgement on the beauty of the aesthetic object.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The Chinese grading system of *pin* is far from being an autonomous art theory. It is related, in origin, to the Chinese characterological tradition, within which a scholar-artist's inner being –

personality and moral integrity – and outer being – appearance, behavior and aesthetic self-discourse – are inseparable. What I want to explain here is that we cannot draw a simple conclusion about *pin* as a grading system as Chinese art critics paid no attention to the artistic value of a specific work of painting or calligraphy when they applied an evaluation category of *pin* to the work. This is a crucial issue. Because when a contemporary philosopher of art such as Malcolm Budd pronounces that artistic value is incommensurable, what he is talking about is the value of an artwork *as* an artwork, its intrinsic value rather than other kinds of value, not to mention the value of the creative subject (Budd 2008: 98). Artistic value is the concern of artistic judgment. This is reflected in many Chinese critical texts, such as in the following famous paragraph from the Ming dynasty artist and connoisseur Xiang Mu (fl. 1590):

[When it comes to appreciation,] there is appreciation by the ears, appreciation by the eyes, and appreciation by the mind... In the first place when a calligraphic work unfolds, if one looks up the authors of inscriptions and judges the work by the collectors' seals, rather than contemplating the work's *yi* (ideas) and *fa* (techniques) and identifying its paper and ink, we can use *mujian* (judging by the eyes) to describe this type of appreciation with which the viewer only factitiously praises some random brush lines. (Xiang 2002: 256–257)

One of Xiang's accusations against *mujian* is that those viewers employing *mujian* do not actually contemplate a work's *yi* (ideas) and *fa* (techniques). These two terms can be regarded as a pair that denotes the two aspects of the aesthetic objects in calligraphic appreciation.

A pure value matrix envisaged by analytic aestheticians is unlikely to be provided, because in the analytic tradition, as Bruce Vermazen claimed, two artworks can be compared only if they have the same independently valuable property and only that one valuable property (Vermazen 1975: 7–14). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the emergence of the aesthetic issue of comparing artistic value owes much to the fact that we tend to make judgments such as: this is good art, and that is bad; and Fan Kuan's *Travellers among Mountains and Streams* is better than Wang Yun's *Shadowy Summer Grove after Juran*. I think it is precisely this urge to compare artists and works of art that contributes to the development of the Chinese evaluative framework of *pin*, which I believe deserves to be incorporated into Western aesthetic discussions of comparative judgment of the value of art.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion of the development of the rank system between the Han and the Tang, see Elman 2000: 5–7.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of *tianran* and *gongfu* in Six Dynasties' calligraphy criticism, see Ledderose 1984: 267.

<sup>3</sup> Translation based on the following two versions: Escande 2014: 163; Chiang 1973: 220.

<sup>4</sup> For more discussions on *yi*, see Xu 2001: 182–196.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Beardsley 1979: 723–749; Vermazen 1975: 7–14.

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# The Origins of Translingualism: From Classical to Contemporary Literatures in Contact

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CLAUDIA ZUCCA

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to draw parallels between classical and medieval translingual literature to modern contemporary post-colonial literature. In this regard, it explores literatures in contact, which use more than one language, a language variety or a second language. From a historical perspective, it explores the rise of the Roman Empire and the adoption of Latin in classical literature. Consequently, it examines the growth of vernacular languages into dominant languages in the Middle Ages in Europe to understand the ways in which languages have been shaped by translingual authors and texts. It makes comparisons with the rise of English as a *Lingua Franca* and discusses the way language varieties attempt to decentralise and challenge the notion of standardisation, creating innovative texts in contact.

**Keywords:** Translingual, multilingual, linguistics, classical literature, medieval literature, post-colonial literature

## Introduction

Many of the discussions of the phenomena connected with migration, diaspora, borders, post-colonialism, transnationalism and with linguistic, ethnic and cultural practices tend explicitly or implicitly to conceive them as essentially modern, contemporary phenomena. Yet, the phenomenon of writing in different languages and cultures has persisted throughout the centuries. (cf. Kellman 2000: Zucca 2010<sup>1</sup>: Hsy: 2013 Canagarajah 2013) In fact, in ancient and in medieval cultures, writing in more than one language or another language was the norm. (cf. Hsy 2013) Suresh Canagarajah suggests that it is important to recover an understanding of these ‘occluded practices, and theoriz[e] their continuities’, and their relation to the present, which could yield insights and parallels with present and future configurations. (9)

## An Investigation into Key Terms

The recent development of new terminology and paradigms points to changing social, economic, political and technological advancements, which require new communicative alternatives. Thus, the recent development of the term ‘translingual’ and also, of the related terms ‘transnational’, ‘transcultural’ and ‘translanguaging’, to name a few, stem from a twentieth-century concern with relations or disciplines within the fields of contact studies, literature, migration studies, post-colonialism, border studies, diaspora, linguistic, ethnic and cultural practices. These terms also point to the inadequacies or shortcomings inherent in existing terminology. For example, Azayde Seyhan argues that concepts, such as exilic, ethnic, migrant, or diasporic are unable ‘to do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies and cultural practices.’ (9) Scholars still lack the necessary language to name and describe these nuances. In fact, there is a need to investigate terms that are currently used and to take on board more recent and current developments of terms, including an understanding of the term translingualism.<sup>2</sup> It becomes an imperative to understand and evaluate new terminology in the light of other related and/or similar terminology used in the field, such as bi-/and multilingual configurations.

The term multilingualism is currently used to refer to multiple modes of communication, when it can be argued, 'it is not a universal category'. (Pennycook & Makoni et al. 441) The idea that multilingualism signifies a similar notion in different contexts in communication practices is viewed as an 'absurdity.' (441) Furthermore, the term multilingualism tends to lead us directly back to comparisons with the monolingual paradigm. (cf. Yildiz 2012) Due to the lasting effects of the monolingual paradigm, development of communicative practices and the theorization of new concepts have also been hindered. Despite this, both multilingual and translingual practices are still very much alive in both the west and outside the west, although they may have been 'unacknowledged and hidden.' (Yildiz 3, 4, 15) The unease about new terminology is indeed inconsistent or even incoherent and this inconsistency can still be seen in the way the terms translingual and multilingual often overlap. An investigation of the key terms may help reveal important insights and failings, to establish the way certain terms are used and to highlight comparisons and contrasts, noting the often vague, overlapping and contradictory ways these terms are used. The term literary multilingualism is also used in critical literature to discuss the same or similar type of literature as literary translingualism. (cf. de Courtrivon 2003; Kramsch 2009; Foerster 2014) The two terms share much in common and many examples of literary translingualism could be regarded as multilingualism and vice-versa. Yet, the term translingualism has been invoked as a term in recent years, but to a certain extent, overlapping still occurs. (cf. Aneta Pavlenko 2006; Besemer in Pavlenko 2006; Steinitz 2013; Won Lee 2018)

Multilingualism is generally used to refer to an individual or a community that adopts three or more languages, 'either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing.' (McArthur 673) Bilingualism, is generally used to refer to 'the capacity to make alternate (and sometimes mixed) use of two languages.' (126) Notice that the main objective of this definition is to focus on language use. Also, the terms focus on the degree of language proficiency or equal competency language usage, as has been evidenced in second language acquisition (SLA). (cf. Yaron Matras 2009; Grosjean François Grosjean and Ping Li 2013 and Suresh Canagarajah 2013) Multilingualism is open to the potential of being neutral, in that it descriptively classifies a phenomenon, rather than commenting on the functionality and generative qualities in texts where multiple languages are present.

Furthermore, an etymological study highlights that the roots of the terms 'multi'-lingual (many) and 'bi'-lingual (two) point to a numerical quantity. In contrast, the prefix 'trans' signifies movement, going through, crossing over, across and beyond.<sup>3</sup> (Klein 1639) Thus, 'trans' places emphasis on change and transformation. Canagarajah argues that the term multilingual conceives of the relationship between languages in an additive manner. This gives the picture of whole languages added one on top of the other to form multilingual competence.<sup>4</sup> (7) In this light, the term multilingual fails to 'accommodate the dynamic interactions between languages.' (7). A significant finding is that the terms bi- and/or multilingual tend to keep languages systems separate, even if they do address multiple languages. The emergent term translingual emphasises processes that go beyond discrete language systems and structures, which allow an engagement in diverse multiple meaning-making systems.

A translingual approach to languages as used in this article, focuses on how languages negotiate and interact with each other to generate new meanings, as opposed to something that we have or have access to. (cf. Zucca 2020 and Min-Zhan Lu & Horner in Canagarajah) A translingual approach and practice is a 'transdisciplinary consequence of the re-conceptualisation of the way languages are used, in what contexts and in what manner.' (Zucca 60) It is in this sense, that we can begin to make sense of translingual processes, practices and orientations in literary discourses in oral, written and digital texts and platforms and theatrical representations, as well as in literacy and pedagogy.<sup>5</sup> (60)

### **A Historical Perspective of the Development of Languages: From The Tower of Babel to the Emergence of the Roman Empire and its Linguistic Dominance**

Stories that account for the presence of multiple languages have appeared in early textual sources in mythologies and theogonies. However, the story of *The Tower of Babel* is not unique to the Bible. Tales with similar features can be found in oral accounts and written texts all over the world.<sup>6</sup> It has been hypothesized that at one stage the Indo-European languages may have had the same origin, or are in some ways related to each other. Torres Janson believes there may very well have been what can be considered an original language, but it is difficult to reconstruct it from existent languages. (55) Studies in language contact have shown how and why languages tend to shift, evolve, transform and change over periods of time, due to internal pattern pressures and external factors. Thomason & Kaufmann confirm that there are inclinations within a language that change ‘in certain ways as a result of structural imbalances.’ (9) However, they also argue that the social context, and not only the structure of the language involved, determines the direction and the degree of linguistic change. (19)

The historian Nicholas Ostler cites three types of changes that result from direct contact between communities: migration, diffusion and infiltration. (19) In diffusion, a community comes to assimilate the language of those they come in contact with. (19) Infiltration, on the other hand, is a mixture of migration and diffusion. (19) Through diffusion and/or infiltration a language can become a *lingua franca*. In order for this to happen, a language must be taken up by a community of people whose native language is not the language they currently speak. (19) This investigation in historical linguistics, helps to explain one of the motives that contributed to the rise of Latin during the Roman Empire.

A second important linguistic aspect to take into consideration is the rise of vernaculars during the Roman Empire, which occur when a group of speakers do not have a lot of linguistic and social involvement and contact with other people that speak the same language. In this case, a separate type of language or speech form may start to develop. Janson refers to this development as a ‘dialect.’ (26) Linguistic variants are also considered as dialects. Philologists and dialectologists generally regard a dialect ‘as a historical subtype of a language and a language as the aggregate of its dialects.’ (Romaine in McArthur et al. 290) This exploration is of relevance for it helps to understand the origins of European languages via the vernacular and attempts to draw parallels with the rise of English varieties in contemporary post-colonial literature. Revaluating and reconsidering the role that writing in different languages and language varieties has played in ancient and medieval literatures may help to draw significant parallels between past and present.

### **The Languages of the Roman Empire**

With the rise of the Roman Empire, Latin became well-established in North Africa in present-day Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, presumably as well as in Europe.<sup>7</sup> (Janson 95, 96) The conquered territories, however, did not all abandon their original languages.<sup>8</sup> Though retaining its power, the Roman Empire, did not seek to eliminate other languages in use.<sup>9</sup> Normally, common people spoke vulgar Latin (*lingua Latina vulgaris*), which varied in each region. In all other affairs, learned Latin was preferred. Though each region pronounced Latin differently, it was written in the same way for centuries.

Literature in the Roman Empire reflected the power and authority of learned Latin over vulgar Latin and local vernaculars. In fact, many writers adopted learned Latin in place of their mother tongue. Kellman refers to these writers as ‘monolingual translinguals’. (xxxii) He extends this concept to embrace ‘ambilingual translinguals’, his term for those who are ‘fluent and accomplished in more than one language.’ (xxxii) Seneca (ca. 54 BC – ca. 35 AD), who was Hispanic wrote in Latin – in the adopted language. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354 – ca. 430 AD), a Roman African



born in Algeria also used Latin. Andronicus Lucius Livius, (ca. 284 – ca. 204BC) was considered the first literary writer in Latin, but he was in actual fact a Greek slave. He adapted Greek master works of the *Odyssey* by using Latin and traditional patterns of Roman verse. (Ostler 251) Greek culture still permeated Roman culture.<sup>10</sup> This resulted in a total diffusion and infiltration of Greek into Roman culture. Thus, well-educated Romans were bilingual in Greek and Latin over the next five hundred years. (252)

Lucius Apuleius (c.125– c.180), a Berber native to the Roman colony of Madaura, Algeria, was educated at Carthage and in Athens. His text *Metamorphoses*, also known as *The Golden Ass*, is his only one to have survived in its entirety. According to Ezra Pound, Apuleius ‘writes in a style that would have offended Tacitus and disgusted Cicero and Quintilian. (3) He adds that just like Dante and Villon, he also uses the language of the people, but he writes in a new and eccentric Latin, ‘at a time, when the language of the Roman court was Greek.’ (3) William Adlington (fl. 1566) who translated his work describes it as ‘such a frank and flourishing a stile [...] so drake and high a stile, in so strange and absurd words and in such new invented phrases.’ (Adlington in Pound 3) Adlington’s statement, though written centuries ago, is still strikingly relevant today, in that certain contemporary writing may reflect those of antiquity. Although Apuleius masters Latin, he still pleads forgiveness if his writing appears unpolished, unrefined and crude: “En ecce praefamur veniam, si quid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis looctuor offendero”.<sup>11</sup> Apuleius does not produce similar writings to that of his Latinate classical peers. Furthermore, his text shows communalities with modern and current translingual writers, who also attempt to do ‘unheard of things’, albeit with a modern lingua franca, by including and incorporating their linguistic and cultural repertoires, and in so doing, foreground new linguistic and cultural territories. (Achebe 50)

Apuleius’s text is written by an African, who has mastered Latin, while basing his text on a Greek model. The concept of *Africitas*, is a term that is now being considered to refer to Apuleius’ African heritage, his Romano-African identity, and his links to geographical, linguistic and cultural connections with Africa and Rome. Yet, his African heritage is often downplayed in scholarship. (cf. Vincent Hunink 2014; Nencioni 1939) Although recent scholarship in the field have attempted to revive this concept. (cf. Benjamin Lee et al. 2014) For example, Giovanni Nencioni suggests that vocabulary borrowed from Northern Africa into Latin texts is not that significant with regard to both quantity and quality due to the fact that Latin was already consolidated at such a point as to reduce the possibility of infiltrations and innovations on behalf of other languages.<sup>12</sup> (Nencioni 46–47) On the other side of the spectrum, scholars such as Sonia Sabnis, Daniel, L. Seldon and Richard Fletcher are keen to bring forms of Africanism in Apuleius’ work to the foreground. Seldon views the Apuleian world as conversing ‘in three languages, with varying degrees of proficiency, depending on the speaker: Libyic and Punic, [and] Latin.’ (210) Silvia Mattiacci proposes to redefine the concept of *Africitas*, to include the notion of a spoken form of Latin with regional, African characteristics, and the notion of African schools with special features that may have influenced literary Latin. (92–93)

Shirley Geok-lin Lim has suggested, in particular with regard to St Augustine of Hippo (AD 354 – 430) and his *Confessions*, that Latinate texts ‘continue[s] to be read outside the politics of language and with little attention paid to the elisions produced by the totalizing dominance of Latin in the written life.’ (Lim in de Courtrivon 46) A new reading in this respect could shed light as to what extent these texts were and are affected and fractured by the dominance of a lingua franca and the tensions this may have produced in their writing.

The notion of the monolingual paradigm may help to highlight the problems and pressures that arise when writing within a dominant discourse. Yildiz argues that these pressures ‘have not just obscured multilingual practices across history [but] they have also led to active processes of monolingualization, which have produced more monolingual subjects [...] Without, however, fully eliminating multilingualism.’ [(Yildiz 2) my addition] It is not difficult to note commonalities

with today's era of globalization, migration and technological advancements in which societies tend towards homogenised communities. This has had a crucial effect on issues of difference and identity. However, it is significant to highlight that although the concept of monolingualisation is dominant, many writers have found and still find ways of transcending the imposed boundaries of monolingualisation and of integrating their multiple worlds and words, even in seemingly monolingual texts, using strange words and phrases and/or writing with the backdrop of other language/s. It could be argued that these unique types of writing stretch the boundaries of aesthetics and monolingualisation, so that they may be able to work 'outside the imperial centres of monolingual discourse, moving away from the ideal of singular Latinate lives toward stories of fractured, bilingual, and dialogical relations.' (de Courtrivon 47)

### The Demise of Latin: The Rise of Vulgar Languages

With the fall of the Roman Empire, important linguistic changes take place. In this period, western Europe did not retain any strong political power. The invading Germans did not possess the administrative abilities of the Romans and they were unable to establish their language as the dominant language in Europe. However, this still led to important consequences for Latin. Speech forms started to evolve and 'each region developed its own speech patterns'.<sup>13</sup> (Janson 101) Eco characterises this era as a 'dark' age for it 'seemed to witness a reoccurrence of the catastrophe of Babel'.<sup>14</sup> (17, 18) The first Europeans were illiterate and spoke different vulgar tongues. It was in Eco's view, the age that we witness the rise of the languages we speak today. (Eco 18)

Most official documents were still written in Latin and handled by a few people. However, around 842 AD there is a record of a different written language. The Strasbourg oath is one of the first examples of the birth of a new language. (Janson 114) The first language used in this text is regarded as Old French. As early as 880 AD, the earliest surviving piece of French hagiography that appears in the vernacular is entitled *Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie*, *The canticle of Saint Eulalie*. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Jean Bodel, in his *Chanson de Saisnes*, divides medieval literature into three subject areas: Matter of France, Matter of Rome and Matter of Britain. The second category, Rome, refers roughly to the vernacular. The language used in this period is sometimes referred to as 'Roman' and sometimes 'François'.<sup>15</sup> At the time when the French language developed a written form in the north of France, another type emerged in the south of France. (Janson 114-116) In this Region, the language that was in use was Occitan<sup>16</sup> and 'the main dialect, on which the written language is based, is Provençal'.<sup>17</sup> (116) Dante, Petrarch and Pound considered the troubadour Arnaut Daniel (12<sup>th</sup> century) to be the major writer of this dialect. Pound suggests that, 'the Troubadours were melting the common tongue and fashioning it into new harmonies depending not upon the alternation of quantities but upon rhyme and accent.' (13) His view can also support certain post-colonial and contemporary texts and writers, who also fashion the English language in particular ways to suit their aesthetic aims.

The first defence of the vernacular takes place in the seventh century, in Irish folklore prior to the Strasbourg oath. It is written by the scholar Longarad, entitled *Auraicept na n-Éces*, *The scholars primer*. It precedes Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and Chernorizets Hrabar's *O Pismeneh*. In the text, the legendary king Fenius Farsaidh chooses the best features of all the confused languages and fuses them to create Goidelic, the Irish language. In Eco's view, it was 'an attempt, on the part of Irish grammarians, to defend spoken Gaelic over learned Latin.' (Eco16) He considers Goidelic 'the first, programmed language, constructed after the confusion of tongues.' (16)

The birth of the Italian language in the thirteenth century also marks a significant cultural and literary turning point. It bears testimony to the way in which a new language can be shaped and crafted through a written construct. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is credited with having contributed to the development of the Italian language. Dante's linguistic world consisted of medieval diglossia, with Latin, the high language of science and religion at the top, and the

vulgar (vulgus) language of the people, considered the lower language at the bottom. (Fortuna et al. 2) To explain his reasons for adopting the vernacular over Latin, Dante writes a treatise on the nature of language. It is the first treatise of its kind and the only known work of medieval literary theory to have been produced by a practising poet.<sup>18</sup> According to Janson, ‘it is the first investigation of dialects ever made.’ (121) Dante has written extensively on the question of language throughout his works, in *Convivio* I, *Vita Nova* XII – XXV, *Paradiso* XXVI, and especially the Latin treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ‘On Eloquence in the Vernacular’. The latter text deals with the function of language, its origins and the diversity of languages. (Fortuna et al. 3) Dante’s aspiration was to create a new written language, which he called, ‘*volgare illustre*’.<sup>19</sup> By this he meant a distinguished vernacular.<sup>20</sup> (Eco 43) Dante aimed to establish ‘the restoration<sup>21</sup> of the natural and universal *forma locutionis* of Eden’ through his poetical efforts. (44) His objective was to restore these original premises into a modern invention. This was the only way ‘a modern poet might heal the wound of Babel.’ (45)

Dante desired to refine, elevate and normalize a single language. It was not to promote writing in multiple languages. However, his texts are permeated with different languages from *Vita Nuova* to the *Divina Commedia*. In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante makes recourse to Latin, Provençal, Old French, and a wide array of Italian vernaculars. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* respects the hierarchy of languages with Latin at the top. Dante is keen to ensure that his work maintains a ‘continuity with the precepts of tradition’ and he is careful when challenging conventions, although even his early works show evidence of the use of different languages, beyond tradition. (Barański in Fortuna et al. 101) This is more apparent in the *Commedia*, where the Florentine dialect is embellished and blended with ‘Latinisms, Gallicisms, [...] regionalisms [and], other foreign words.’ (101) In an extract from *Purgatorio* xxvi, Dante encounters the Troubadour poet Arnaut.<sup>22</sup> He writes:

«El cominciò liberamente a dire: “Tan m’abellis vostre cortes deman, qu’ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire. Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan; consiros vei la passada folor, e vei jausen lo joi qu’esper, denan. Ara vos prec, per aquella valor que vos guida al som de l’escalina, sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor!”. Poi s’ascose nel foco che li affina.»<sup>23</sup> (XXVI 139–148)

The first line of the stanza of this extract commences in the Florentine Dialect in the Narrator’s voice. The second line is in Arnaut’s regional dialect Occitan, based on Provençal. The passage code-switches, that is, it alternates between these two dialects within the same context. (cf. Grosjean 18) The last line in the extract, code-switches back to the Florentine Dialect. Although the two languages appear to represent two distinct units and distinct linguistic systems, their mixing in this context, represents a type of crossing over. The extract mixes and merges language varieties in the same context, generating an innovative text. The extract shifts expectations, from one linguistic register to another, emphasising a movement across voices, languages and cultures. The extract conveys both a transcultural and translingual process, this is highlighted, on one hand, by the cross-over movement from one language to another, and on the other, by the ways in which the languages interact and co-create new meaning in new contexts. Significantly, the two languages highlight an instance of dialogue between languages, voices and differing cultures.

In the last line of the extract, the sequence is closed off by linking the two passages and languages together. Arnaut asks for forgiveness for his foolish ways in the past in the Occitan dialect, but Dante grants him forgiveness in the Italian Vulgar language: “Poi s’ascose nel foco che li affina” (Then he hid within the purifying fire).” (148) This fire is viewed as cathartic. It helps Arnaut purge from the sin of lust. However, fire can also be viewed as the basic element of a craftsman’s tools. In this sense, Dante is also referring to Arnaut’s ability as a great craftsmanship. For Dante, Arnaut was the greatest craftsman of a vulgar language, his native language.

The process of movement from the written dominant language of Latin, to the written vernacular languages gradually took place all over Europe. The new languages were vehicles for literature, but they were also expressions of political power. (Janson 123) Dante had desired a politically,

coherent country, which a distinguished vernacular could achieve. He succeeded by producing one of the great literary masterpieces of all time, *The Divine Comedy*, which became a 'linguistic model' for the Italian language. (123) It helped to develop the Florentine dialect into one of the European languages. The names Italian, Roman, François and/or 'Occitan were only acquired after the language was written. Europe emerged from the Babel of tongues. Yet, it existed well before a name had been invented for the language. (Eco 18) Europe was forced at the very moment of its conception to confront the drama of linguistic fragmentation. (18) In this light, the very idea of a European culture arose out of a situation of linguistic and cultural contact, and due the creation and formation of multilingual societies.<sup>24</sup>

### **From Medieval Vernaculars to Standard English Varieties**

In Canagarajah's view, the English language developed as a creole language and was originally 'a set of mobile and fragmented semiotic resources, lacking unitary identity, in its very inception.' (Canagarajah 52) It was not until around the sixteenth century that a standardised form of English starts to develop. This was due to the advent of technological developments of the printing press, but also through the political reforms of King Alfred. Yet, there were still a variety of regional dialects, which tended to disappear from written texts, making language more unified.

In the eighteenth century, the United States adopted a policy of pragmatism that favoured the dominance of the English language. But at the same time, there was still a linguistic culture formed around a multi-ethnic identity 'that emerged through the [...] mercantilism aboard ships and in port cities, in the slave castles of West Africa and on the New World plantations, and in pan-Indian resistance movements' (Trimbur in Horner 27). Among these varieties, there were also African creole varieties of English, which were parallel to the English varieties imported to the USA from England, as well as West African Englishes. (Canagarajah 54) These varieties became the plantation creoles that were spoken in the USA and also in the Caribbean, South America, and in West Africa. (54) In recent contexts of post-colonialism and postmodern globalization, English has undergone further changes in relation to the diverse multilingual repertoires and practices. These linguistic practices in contemporary lingua franca encounters have caused scholars to rethink the role of English in monolingualistic terms and to reconsider and define English in more global terms. (cf. Canagarajah 2013) These changes are evident in the coinage of different labels now in use, for example: World Englishes (WE), English as an International Language (EIL), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). These models offer insights into the ways the role of English is evolving. Yet, it is of significance to consider the dynamic relationship between languages and language varieties and their interactions in instances of contact, to understand the ways they negotiate and co-create new meanings in literary, pedagogical and every day speech contexts. (cf. Canagarajah et al. for an exploration of findings in pedagogy and literacy)

### **English Varieties: From Creolisation to Decreolisation in West Indian Contexts**

This section explores the development of pidgin and creolised varieties and the process of decreolisation in the West Indies. There are several varieties of English in the West Indies, including Jamaican, Barbadian, Trinidadian and Guyanese variants. Each has a similar syntax, grammar structure and vocabulary that resemble, to some degree, standardized norms. There are however, also substantial differences. For example, the Barbadian variant, Barbadian (Bajan) English, shares characteristics with Hiberno-English (Irish English).<sup>25</sup> (Graddol 210) Black American Vernacular English also shares many features with English based creoles in the Caribbean. (Romaine 270-271) Furthermore, British Black English, spoken by immigrants from the Caribbean and their offspring share features that are inherited from the Caribbean. (270-271) At a syntactic level, English creole has more in common with the creole of other languages than with standard English.

English creole's vocabulary may sometimes be based on English. Grammar can also be altered by following other grammatical structures from different languages. Phonological systems may also differ significantly.

Similarities in syntactic and semantics among creoles are due to an innate 'bio-programme' for language. In this regard, creoles are useful in providing an 'insight into the basic nature of human language capacity' (Leith 208) and presenting a fundamental 'key to understanding the original evolution of human language.' (Romaine 270-271) Creole languages arise due to contact with speakers of different languages. This contact first produces a 'makeshift language', identified as a pidgin. (Romaine 270) When a pidgin develops into the language of a community, creolisation takes place. In the West Indies creolisation occurred due to contact between African<sup>26</sup> and European languages, incorporating features from both languages. These inclusions consist of the appropriation, adoption and modification of linguistic patterns of the languages involved in the contact. Over time, a new variety of English may establish itself. It may have a distinct identity, 'as having a generally understood social status with the community.' (Leith 185) However, continued contact with standard forms can also give rise to a process called decreolisation. When this occurs, the variant tends to move and converge towards standard English. However, this process may also give rise to a post-creole continuum. This occurs when either a post-pidgin or a post-creole variety is under a period of renewed influence from the Standard language. (Romaine 270-271) In this instance, as in the case of American Black English, the process of de-creolisation can obscure the origins of a variety. (270-271)

### **Dialects, the Vernacular and the Notion of Nation Language**

This section explores and compares the notion and usage of the terms, 'dialect', 'vernacular' and the concept of 'nation language'. Language variants are usually referred to as dialects and a dialect is viewed as a 'subtype of a language' and a language is considered as the 'aggregate of its dialects.' (Romaine 290) Against the notion of dialect, Braithwaite has argued for his preference for the term 'nation language'. (cf. Braithwaite in Maybin 1996: 269) He views the term dialect as having pejorative connotations, it is viewed as an inferior type of English. (Braithwaite in Maybin 269) On the other hand, the term nation language is the language that was spoken by those who were brought to the Caribbean, the language of slaves and labourers. (269) It is not the official language that is now spoken. This language is influenced by the African model. Yet, it may be English in terms of its lexicon, but it is not English in terms of its syntax, its rhythms and timbre, even though the words are English 'to a greater or lesser degree.' (266, 269) Braithwaite suggests that another characteristic of nation language is its orality, in that 'it is based on sound and song.' (270) Furthermore, it foregrounds the political. Paula Burnett argues that the term vernacular is preferable for it is 'uncontaminated with pejorative connotations', whilst the term nation language, although a worthwhile attempt is not used widely. (Burnett xxv) This article highlights the difficulty in naming certain linguistic processes due to resistance, processes of colonisation, diversity and politics.

### **Writing in the Language/s of the Lost Mother Tongue: Inventing Language**

This section explores the literary and critical work by the Caribbean author Linton Kwesi Johnson and the Barbadian writer Edward Kamau Braithwaite. The literary extract below is taken from Johnson's (1976) *Street 66*.

'De room woz dark-dusk howlin softly  
Six-a-clack,  
Charcoal lite defying site woz  
Moving black;



De soun woz muzik mellow steady flow,  
 an man-son min jus mystic red,  
 Green, red, green.... Pure scene.' (Johnson 364)

Johnson uses language in a particular way to create bridges between his linguistic and cultural repertoires. In this extract above, the linguistic interferences, such as 'De', 'woz' and 'clack' emphasise the complex interrelationship between languages and language varieties. (364) These words add new textures and resonances of the Caribbean culture to texts that avail of an English variety. These nuances affect the aesthetic qualities and literariness of the poem. The supposed deficiency, which might once have been viewed as a negative deviation from standard norms, instead valorises difference and highlights the creative innovations in translingual writing, where words create bridges between different cultures and languages. It also highlights what Vershawn Young has defined as code-meshing, that is the use of a standard code with a language variety.<sup>27</sup> The forms of borrowing<sup>28</sup> and code-meshing and switching in translingual texts are highly literary: they do not always comply with the actual speech patterns of a given community. The degree and frequency of code-meshing and switching in literary texts may appear more conflated and perhaps more artificial than real life contact situations, but not for this reason less significant and unworthy of critical research.

The Barbadian author Edward Kamau Braithwaite also uses Standard English alongside a creole variety *Black + Blues*. The following extract is taken from the poem *Starvation*.

'i did swim into dis worl from a was a small bwoy  
 an i never see harbour yet  
 Ship cyan spot no pilot light  
 a burning tru dis wall a silence  
 wid me dread' (Braithwaite 19)

Creole speech forms are evident in words, such as 'dis', 'cyan', 'wid' and 'tru'. (19) Standard grammar norms are not consistent with standard English, for example, the extract avails of the present tense 'see' where a perfect tense would normally be used. Thus, the text uses a simplified linguistic register. In linguistic terms, this is known as a linguistic reduction, which is typical of creole languages.

The following extract from the poem *Manchille*, also highlights code-meshing:

'is escape dem-a farr  
 musk rose blooms  
 the tight room w  
 its oils. drying clothes  
 stale mask of nivea cream'. (Braithwaite 24)

The first line makes use of an intrasentential switch. This signifies that the switch occurs within the clause. The switch to English in the second line, in contrast, is an intersentential switch, as it occurs at a sentence boundary or clause. The poem opens in creole and switches to standard English.<sup>29</sup> The third line includes an abbreviated form of 'with', 'w/'. (25) The words have been altered and severed, as in 'luminous w/ flesh' and 'circled w/ flowers'. (25) Spellings are modified to focus on the phonics, 'wheels tearing the gravel as darkness xplodes in the engine.' (26) The text becomes a fertile site of innovative linguistic exchanges, as well as a cross-cultural site, where languages resist and compete with each other. These exchanges highlight language in the making and in process.

Written texts in English varieties challenge notions of standardisation, established literary traditions and the canon. Underwriting creole within the authority of a literary form, changes the dynamics of power, centre and margin. Thus, the linguistic centre and the cultural capital of standard English is decentred. In these linguistic exchanges, new forms emerge that change the



nature of dominant discourse and language. English is defamiliarized and is in some instances unrecognizable, defying laws of logic, grammar and standardisation. Canagarajah suggests that creole and pidgins ‘participate in the same creative meaning-making processes of translingual contact.’ (Canagarajah 59)

### Recolonising and Defamiliarising English

Adlington’s (1566) statement with regard to Apuleius’ strange writing, written centuries ago is still of striking relevance today. In his essay entitled *Colonialist Criticism*, the Nigerian author and critic Chinua Achebe writes, ‘and let no one be fooled by the fact we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it.’ (Achebe 50) In the Nigerian author Saro-Wiwa’s novel, entitled *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, English is defamiliarised.

‘So, although everyone was happy at first, after some time, everything begin to spoil small by small and they were saying that trouble have started. [...] Radio begin dey hala<sup>30</sup> as ‘e never hala before. Big big grammar. Long words. Everytime. Before before, the grammar was not plenty and everybody was happy. But now grammar begin to plenty and people were not happy. As grammar plenty, na so trouble plenty. And as trouble plenty, na so plenty people were dying.’ (Saro-Wiwa 3)

The text is written in a blend of pidgin English (the lingua franca of the former British colonies in West Africa.) and standard English. It incorporates the prosody and rhythms of Nigerian speakers as in the sentence, ‘small by small’ and ‘radio begin dey hala’. (3) It also highlights what linguistics refer to as aspects of ‘imperfect learning’ in second language acquisition (SLA), in the sense that the language has become entrenched and fossilised at certain points of SLA. This is also evident in the sentence ‘everything begin to spoil’. (3)

Although the text mimics speech of a certain community, it is an example of a literary construct. Saro-Wiwa’s novel does not make an apology in the vein of Apuleius, who may himself have been ironic in his defence. On the contrary, Saro-Wiwa’s text can be seen as an act of defiance. The English language is defamiliarized in a creative and unique way. It is written ‘with delicate and consummate skill’ (Boyd in Saro-Wiwa)<sup>31</sup> Saro-Wiwa explains that the text has no rules and no syntax, ‘it thrives on lawlessness.’ (Saro-Wiwa) However, this claim seems slightly exaggerated. In Boyd’s view, in the text, ‘English has been skilfully hijacked – or perhaps ‘colonized’ would be a better word. (Boyd in Saro-Wiwa)

Mimicry plays a pivotal role in discussions of SLA and is often used in post-colonial settings to refer to the ambivalent relations between coloniser and the colonised subject. When the colonising authority exerts expectations upon the colonised subject to learn and adopt the colonisers cultural values and language, this representation results in an imitation that can never be a faithful representation of an original copy, but rather ‘a blurred copy’ (Ashcroft and Griffiths et al. 124) or an obscured replica that cannot fully represent an original version. Furthermore, this new replica can be perceived as ‘quite threatening’. (124) The reason for this feeling of threat is that mimicry can become in turn a mockery of all that it attempts to emulate. This is because it appears to parody that which it mimics. (124) Furthermore, in Homi Bhabha’s view, not only does it contain a mockery but also a certain menace, ‘so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace’. (86) Thus, this illusion of a faithful reproduction can be viewed as a failure of representation. In this sense, mimicry reveals the limitations of colonial discourse, what we have here is ‘a flawed colonial mimesis’. (87) However, this essential flaw is also what sets this writing apart, for it highlights the ways these texts engage with and within languages, in unique, oblique and creative ways. Thus, the ‘imperfect’ rendering of what is mimicked is used as a literary aesthetic mode. On the one hand, Saro-Wiwa’s novel is an example of the way the text critiques the coloniser’s difficult grammar and ‘long words’, but it does so, by parodying the colonizers’ speech. (Saro-Wiwa 3) Furthermore, it includes words from Nigerian origin, such as ‘Yanga’, Kpuhu! and ‘Kotuma’. (3,

4, 8) Thus, the relationship in the text is one of ambivalence in its form of mimicry. Saro-Wiwa uses English, but in a way that negates the very nature of the English language itself, by using language/s on his own terms. However, in terms of the translingual, the text conveys new ways of engaging with languages and cultures in contact. This engagement with and within languages produces texts that are at the interstices of languages and cultures. Furthermore, the text calls to the fore ambivalence, defiance and mockery, in that the text moves beyond the control of colonial authority, which disturbs dominant discourse. (Ashcroft and Griffiths et al. 126). Mimicry, in this sense, is a destabilising force, which produces innovative ways of writing that move beyond the colonizer's language into new terrain.<sup>32</sup>

### Conclusion

This article attempts to draw parallels between classical and medieval translingual literature to that of post-colonial contemporary writing, which is often overlooked. It is as if there is no *priori* and no beginning. Yet, the phenomenon of writing in more languages is not unique, it is as old as *babel* itself. This investigation strengthens the still underdeveloped understanding of what exactly is and is not new about contemporary translingual writing.

A translingual approach as used in this article offers new possibilities for exploring the ways languages in contact interact and generate different and innovative types of texts. Apuleius uses Latin in ways similar to contemporary writers, such as Achebe and Braithwaite by subverting, de-normalising and disrupting norms and codes.

Furthermore, a translingual approach to texts allows us to investigate the way languages change and develop into new linguistic varieties and languages. Achebe, Braithwaite, Johnson and Saro-Wiwa, eager like Dante and Arnaut deploy and develop new variants in their own right. They demonstrate the legitimacy of local languages by underwriting them within the authority of literary texts in dominant discourse, thus, signalling a shift in power relations as these variants become languages in their own right. In this sense, the translingual is determined to communicate beyond the monolingual paradigm, by moving into different linguistic territories and breaching linguistic contracts, but at the same time, it creates bridges between differing registers, varieties and languages.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this article were presented at the RIA Symposium, Trinity College Dublin. It has been revised and edited in the light of new research in the field. (Zucca 2010) (cf. Zucca 2020)

<sup>2</sup> The term translingual was adopted by Kellman in 2000. However, the term was previously used by James, S. Holmes in *Translations studies* and in *Medicine* in 1985. It was first used in literary and cultural studies by L. Liu in 1995.

<sup>3</sup> The prefix *trans.* is an umbrella term, it has been used refer to cross-dressers, trans-genderists and transsexuals. This observation highlights the transformational qualities inherent in the term translingual and the term's ability to emphasise crossing over.

<sup>4</sup> For Canagarajah, 'this orientation may lead to the misleading notion that we have separate cognitive compartments for separate languages with different types of competence for each.' (7).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Canagarajah 2013, for a fuller exploration of the translingual in literacy, educational settings and pedagogy.

- <sup>6</sup> Similar accounts can be found in the Kabbalah, the Qur'an and the Book of Jubilees.
- <sup>7</sup> The Greek language continued to be used during the Roman Empire in the eastern part of the Empire and in Roman schools. (Janson 95,96)
- <sup>8</sup> A long-term effect of language shift during the Roman Empire was that languages started to diminish. (Janson 97)
- <sup>9</sup> These varieties coexisted alongside vernacular languages. (McArthur 590)
- <sup>10</sup> The Romans, however, excelled in the ecclesiastic, legal, and military spheres, 'the world and power and order belonged to Rome.' (Janson 253)
- <sup>11</sup> 'I first crave and beg your pardon, lest I should happen to displease or offend any of you by the rude and rustic utterance of this strange and foreign language.' (Kellman 8)
- <sup>12</sup> All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>13</sup> Near the end of the fifth century, people no longer spoke Latin. They spoke 'Gallo-Romanic, Italo-Romanic or Hispano-Romanic.' (Eco16)
- <sup>14</sup> Referring to the biblical confusion of languages, Eco suggests that 'before this confusion there was no European culture, and, hence, no Europe.' (18) Thus, Europe became an entity, but it had 'to wait for the fall of the Roman Empire and the birth of the Romano-Germanic Kingdoms before it could be born.' (18)
- <sup>15</sup> Once texts are written in French, then we witness the appearance of the names French and François. However, the language does not receive its name until a 'written language exists.' (Janson 116)
- <sup>16</sup> Today the written form of Occitan is rarely used. (Janson 116)
- <sup>17</sup> The two names, Provençal and Occitan were used interchangeably. 'As a spoken language Occitan is now retreating in favour of French, the official language of the state.' (Janson 116)
- <sup>18</sup> According to Fortuna et al. Dante 'is the first European thinker of linguistic diversity.' (Fortuna et al. 2) Other theoreticians from the Bible and Plato onwards have discussed linguistic diversity but no one has dealt with it 'in such an elaborate way or developed such a deep understanding of the historicity and variability of language, because nobody before Dante [...] has lived the problem of the plurality of languages in such a vital way as Dante.' (2-3)
- <sup>19</sup> The troubadours and Dante aim 'to refine or to ornament the common speech.' (Pound 3)
- <sup>20</sup> Pound argues that Italian forms are not just a simplification of the Provençal forms, even if the rhyming has been made easier, because the structure of the stanza is much more complex. (Pound 100)
- <sup>21</sup> Dante aimed at creating 'a perfect, modern, natural language, without recourse to a dead language as a model.' (Eco 46)
- <sup>22</sup> In the *Commedia*, Arnaut is the only troubadour to speak in Occitan. Other authors, like Bertran de Born are made to speak in Italian. This is because Dante considered Arnaut superior to all those who wrote in Provençal or what is now known as the French language. (Barański in Fortuna et al. 101)
- <sup>23</sup> 'With willing heart he then began to speak:/ Your courtly way of asking so pleases me/That I neither can nor will refuse you. /I am Arnaut, who weeps and walks while singing. With grief I look back on my foolish past, With joy I watch for hopeful days to come. / Now I implore you, by the goodness/ That guides you to the top of the stairs, Think in good time on my terrible pain. / Then he hid within the purifying fire.' (Dante XXVI)
- <sup>24</sup> For a comparison study between European and Asian languages during the Middle Ages cf. Pollock 2006 and Canagarajah 2013.
- <sup>25</sup> In Leith's view, 'many grammatical patterns in Hiberno-English may derive not from contact with Irish, but from the many different regional varieties of seventeenth century English taken to Ireland by colonists which have become obsolete (or at least vary scarce).' (Leith in Graddol et al. 210)
- <sup>26</sup> There is evidence that the influences of the African languages can be traced in creole languages. For example, the word *adru* (a medical herb) from Twi; *himba* from Ibo (edible wild yam) and *dingki* from Kongo (funeral ceremony) to name a few have all been found in Jamaican Creole. (Graddol et al. 211) Jamaican creole also has words from Portuguese – *Pikni* (small child), Spanish – *bobo* (fool), French – *leginz* ('a bunch of vegetables for a stew') Arawki (the language of the pre-colonial population) – *hicatee* ('a land turtle', adopted via Spanish) and elements of English dialects, which are now scarcely used in England – *haggler* ('a market woman'). (Romaine in McArthur et al. 211)
- <sup>27</sup> More recently, the term code-meshing has been used in the studies of pedagogy, in contrast to the term code-switching in SLA. (cf. Young 2004 713n8; Young 2007; Young in Canagarajah 2013; Canagarajah 2013) For Young code-meshing is the 'blending, adjusting, playing, and dancing with standard English

and academic discourse'. [(Young in Canagarajah 3284–3288) Kindle Version] He refers to this blending of codes as code-meshing, which he views as a 'strategic, self-conscious and un-self-conscious blending of one's own accent, dialect.' (ibid) In this article, code-meshing focuses on the interrelationship between standard English and a language variety, to explore the ways the two codes interact. Furthermore, it attempts to understand what effects this interaction generates in instances of contact in literary contexts.

<sup>28</sup> In the case of borrowing, lexical features are the first elements to be borrowed. Borrowed words may be treated as stems. Heath suggests that 'these stems may really be words, including affixes, in the source language.' (Heath in Thomason & Kaufmann 37) If the item has undergone full integration, the element that is integrated can be regarded as a borrowed item. (McArthur et al. 229) There are exceptions to these rules, which makes it difficult to distinguish between borrowing and code-switching. (cf. McArthur et al. 229)

<sup>29</sup> Jamaican Patwa(h)/patois/patwa termed Jamaican creole by linguists is an English-lexified creole language with West African influences.

<sup>30</sup> holler, shout' (Wiwa-Saro 183)

<sup>31</sup> Introduction

<sup>32</sup> Mimicry can also be viewed in the light of political ideologies.

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# Aesthetic Affect of Anger: Omair Ahmad's *Jimmy the Terrorist* and the Possibilities in *Raudra Rasa*

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NAMRATA CHATURVEDI

**Abstract:** This paper aims to examine the dimensions of aesthetic affect of anger in the *rasa* framework in Indian aesthetics. In the postmodern times, as aesthetic emotions are formulated (packaged and predetermined) and with the digital accessibility of new media, the reader/viewer's engagement as proposed in *rasa* framework becomes relevant and helps to contextualize the debate on what is the nature of art and the aesthetic process itself. To expound on these concerns, this paper reads Omair Ahmad's novel *Jimmy the Terrorist* (2010) and a particular incident in the narrative to understand the emotion of *krodha* (anger) and the affective process leading to the protagonist's behavioural and active response. The aesthetic framework referred to is Bharata's treatise on dramaturgy *The Nāṭyaśāstra* and the interpretations offered by Abhinavagupta with some references to Śaṅkuka's views. In contemporary postmodern aesthetics, these concerns are important as they point to the need for contextualizing the psychological makeup of readers/spectators which is an integral part of the aesthetic process itself.

**Keywords:** *Rasa*, anger, affect, narrative, behaviour

## Introduction

This paper takes a particular incident in the narrative of the novel *Jimmy the Terrorist* (2010) as the point of exploration of aesthetic affect. Omair Ahmad's *Jimmy the Terrorist* is the story of a young educated Muslim youth's struggle against a pre-designed system of social prejudice and political bias that make violence appear as the only choice for the young. Ahmad has located his characters and their lives in a place that can be seen as a prototype of a north Indian city with its infrastructural chaos, urgent dreams, heavy frustrations and everyday struggles. A powerful narrative of loss and anger, it is the story of Jamaal, son of Rafiq and Shaista, who is born and brought up in the town of Moazammabad—a regular small city, with its routine life. When his friend cum brother Khalid is implicated in a minor stealing incident and tortured in lock-up, the lives of all the characters are changed forever. Khalid takes the path of extremism, while Jamaal tries to build a bourgeois life for himself. Finally, overcome with frustration and anguish at being cornered and selectively marginalized for one's cultural and religious background, Jamaal murders a policeman and ends up being called a 'terrorist'. The climax of the novel opens up a scene where Jimmy, overcome with frustration and anger, goes into the theatre to watch the film *Bandit Queen*. When he steps out of the theatre, he is so agitated that with a quotidian trigger, he ends up as a criminal. This essay is interested in exploring what happened to Jimmy's psychoemotive makeup during the film viewing experience and how it shaped his response and behaviour outside the theatre. To this end, the *rasa* framework offers deep insights into the elements, stages and resolutions of the aesthetic process itself.

The structure and classification of *rasa* in Sanskrit aesthetics focus on the psycho-emotive state of the viewer(s) as valid episteme. Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* is an ancient Indian treatise on drama that provides a systematic understanding of the art of staging, acting as well as viewing a dramatic performance. This work elaborates upon the aesthetic experience of the *sahṛdaya*, an ideal



viewer. The relishing of a work of art is considered not just to be an emotional process, but an aesthetic-philosophical one that involves the removal of the layer of mundane experiences from the consciousness of the individual leading to a plane of interpersonalization (*sādhāranikarana*). When the *vibhāva*-determinants, *anubhāva*-consequents, and *vyābhichārībhāva*-accompanying emotions and *sthāyībhāva*-abiding mental states, combine in an apt situation created by an artist, a particular *rasa* is evoked. The aesthetic bliss that is experienced by a spectator/reader is *ānanda* and is accompanied by a knowledge of emotions that is in turn the knowledge of the self. Bharata propounded eight *rasa* to which Abhinavagupta, his later commentator added a ninth *rasa-sānta*. A study of *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its commentaries by Bhatta Lolatta, Śankuka and Abhinavagupta point to sustained engagement with the process and scope of aesthetic affect in the audience. Śankuka's *Nyāya* aesthetics posited 'inference' (*anumāna*) as the process by which the viewer absorbs the core meaning of the artwork, pointing crucially to an important dimension of the aesthetic experience – 'affect'. Affect theory has gained prominence in Western aesthetics to understand the cognitive, psychological as well as social and political ramifications of art experience. In cinema and media theory, the work of Shaviro (2010) and Shouse (2005) along with other scholars explores the 'affect' of visual media on the audience. While Massumi (2002) differentiates between 'affect' and 'emotion' as the former being asubjective or presubjective and the latter as being derivative and conscious, Shouse has categorized three kinds of affective response to cinema as: Affect, Feeling and Emotion. There has been quantitative research in the field of neuroscience, cognition and aesthetics wherein emotions have been mapped as neuroscientific data when studied in response to social and aesthetic situations (Preckel et al 2018, Tripathi et al) and as indicators of wellbeing in relation to narratives (Pasupathi et al 2017). In the context of Indian aesthetic propositions, there is scope for examining the affective dimensions of *rasa* and the *viśrānti* (rest) and awareness that they bring as the primary aim of aesthetics. This paper attempts to explore Śankuka's and Abhinavagupta's views in the context of *rasānubhūti* to understand the affective dimensions of *rasa*, especially *raudra rasa*. This novel invites us to explore how a character's affective behaviour is shaped by aesthetic anger when real life circumstances of marginalization have already affected his emotional landscape and the consequences therein. As postmodern cultural productions make it imperative to talk about the limitations of 'affective labor' in the prepackaging and fetishizing of emotions, Indian theory of emotions can offer ways of mapping and examining the psychospiritual changes that works of art generate. This will help to critically locate affective responses in contemporary contexts, especially in the domain of sorrow and anger that are ubiquitous in global socio-political lives and when art is largely being seen as serving a utilitarian and/or didactic end.

The novel under discussion is a narrative that is centered on the emotional landscape of anger. Anger (*krodha*) is recognized in the *rasa* framework as the *sthāyībhāva* of *raudra rasa*. In the sequence of *rasa* listed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *raudra rasa* follows *karuṇa rasa* which is described thus: "The *rasa* that originates from the *sthāyībhāva* of *śoka* (grief) is named *karuṇa*. The *vibhāva* (determinants) of it are: separation from loved ones, incarceration, murder, exile, immolation or involvement in vices".

The real life emotional stimuli to grief and anger can be easily mapped onto the lives of socially marginalized characters in the novel. The death of Jamaal's mother becomes the starting point of digression for Rafiq, when the comfort of domesticity is replaced by an uncertain present and a threatened future. Shaista's death completes the rupture between Rafiq and Shabbir Manzil, and his obstinacy and confusion lead him to the path of fanaticism. Jamaal grows up in an environment pervaded by grief. He is brought up without his mother, and this separation proves very painful to him. Rafiq's dedication to his 'cause' prevents him from providing Jamaal an organic upbringing, something Shaista's mere presence would have insured.

The seemingly innocuous event of a young boy involved in a mischief turns momentous in shaping his future and that of others around him. When Khalid is incarcerated and tortured,

the bourgeois codes of his parents' relationships are turned over, and repressed complaints and heartbreaks are brought to the surface. Jamaal's sensibility of a diligent young boy with simple dreams is unable to comprehend the grief of Khalid's separation. Khalid's father's idealism, when faced with a brutal law of the jungle suffers a blow, as he realizes that ideals have no place at least in the warps and wefts of family ties.

The *rasa* of *rāudra* follows the *karuṇa* *rasa* in the order of *rasa* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The emotion of grief is a purifying emotion that stirs the *samskāra* (latent impressions) of individuals. The reaction of every person to grief in the novel is different. While Khalid's grief turns into agitation and rebellion, Jamaal tries to suppress it under the weight of a normal, shyly ambitious life. For some like Khalid, personal grief turns into hatred and anger, while Jamaal's grief struggles with reason, permeates his being and bursts out in a moment of impulse in the end.

The story is set in a fictional small town Moazammabad in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, strongly reminiscent of Gorakhpur and its neighbouring small towns, the little cousins of Lucknow, the state capital. The causes of the emotions of grief and anger are present in the political and religious makeup of the town. State apathy, politicians' manipulations, obstinate prejudices of the people and the clash of vague traditions and misunderstood modernity become the sources that lead to the emotions of sorrow and anger. Abhinavagupta points out in his commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* that the *vibhāva* of *rāudra* are the same in *kāvya* (poetry) and *loka* (world), therefore the *rasa* of *raudra* is not *sthāyibhāvaprabhava* (one originating from the primary emotion) but *sthāyibhāvātma*, which means one that is of the nature of the primary emotion itself. The *raudra* *rasa*, therefore, not merely originates from anger but is of the nature of anger itself. The *sthāyibhāva* of *krodha* is not merely felt by the character on the stage during the dramatic performance, but these bhavas correspond to real life emotions so that there is no distinction between the bhava on stage and the bhava in real life. These bhavas are felt by the characters and the audience alike. As one reads the text, one realizes how the causes that lead to the unfortunate end of a talented and promising young life are recreated/based out of real life. For instance, the indifference of the state towards a town like Moazzamabad is a familiar malaise in Indian political reality. In the novel, Moazzamabad is described as a 'half-blighted place' (p. 3) which is 'too large to be a town and too backward to be a city'.

Whether it was the white sahibs who ruled or the brown ones who took their place, they had no time for Moazzamabad.

Suddenly, now, the worthies in Delhi care. All those who run this magic lantern show we call India-they especially care. This time there was no choice, this time they had to notice, and the vultures had to swoop down, as Moazzam Shah had done long ago. They had been screaming about terrorists for so long that when Moazzamabad presented one of its own, a boy called Jimmy, how could it be ignored. (pp.5-6)

Moazammabad is a place that stands at the same crossroads at which do countless other such places in India – between history and modernity. The novel begins with locating the city in its historical context of raids, cultural exchanges and assimilations. The prologue ends with Moazammabad standing uncertain and confused on the threshold of a misunderstood modernity. In big towns and small cities across India, one easily notices this unusual mixture of fanatical preservation of tradition and zealous appropriation of modernity, a mixture that can never become a blend. In the novel, Rasoolpur mohalla is Rafiq's world. When circumstances force him to step out of his comfort zone, he finds the world to be crueler and wider, and this confrontation results in his misguided fanaticism. When Khalid goes from Moazammabad to New Delhi, it is a more momentous and dramatic clash of worldviews. These shifts reiterate the lopsided model of development that contemporary India is proudly following, and the chasms reflect the ideological and philosophical divides that exist between the powerful and the common in India.

To return to the question of the aesthetic experience, *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists *adhiksepa* as one of the *vibhāva* of *raudra rasa*, which translates as ‘any criticism of country, community, knowledge, *kula*, or action’. The prologue of this novel clearly highlights the hurt that comes from the sense of one’s country wounded. Jamaal’s father becomes a mullah in the wake of the crisis, and the young boy finds his life poised before the perplexing and parochial fundamentalism of an institutionalized religion. The cause of the crisis becomes its effect so that human lives are transported as goods between one prejudice and the other. The fabric of secular India, already tenuous, fails to repair the many holes rendered by communal bullets that have not ceased to rain till date. Jamaal’s father reacts to this insult to his community in a predictable manner, attempting to do the futile-beating hatred with hatred.

Another *vibhāva* listed by Bharata is *anrayatabhāsana* saying the inappropriate or lie. In an atmosphere of strained relationships, parasites like untruths, half-truths and sheer lies multiply rapidly feeding on reason and judgment. In the story, we come across numerous instances when exaggerated or at times fabricated accounts of violence are related in order to fuel anger and hatred.

In that compressed and wound-up space rumours spread, first like stains and then like small fires. Somebody had been killed by the police, a priest had been caught with guns in his Maruti van, a young woman had been raped—always such women were beautiful, and then ritually slashed and scarred. Always the mob was coming to kill. (p.155)

In an atmosphere of prejudice and intolerance, these half-truths assume monstrous proportions, and narratives of violence beget violence that begets more such narratives.

As Khalid’s story whirled through the mohalla, Rafiq recalled for people the recent incident of two Muslim boys going missing from the railway station in Lucknow, and their bodies turning up mysteriously in the Gomti river three days later....After all, what did it matter if Khalid was a thief? There were other thieves, and were they beaten as he had been? Nobody had tried to kidnap or kill them in broad daylight. If they were looking to kill Khalid, then, was it because he was a thief or because he was a Muslim? All Jamaal had to do was listen to his father, to see the peace on his father’s face when he recalled another violent or hushed-up incident, from another time, and showed how it all fit. (p. 150–152)

Bharata states that the nature of a person experiencing the emotion of anger is *uddhata* or one that is given to agitation. This anger is the result of injustice (*anyāyakarita*) and is a natural human reaction. In the narrative, worldly causes and stimuli to anger can be seen as easily identifiable with real life. There is a difference between Rafiq, Imam Sahab, Khalid and Jamaal to the situation of injustice. Khalid’s experience in the lock up was first hand and his anger thickened as a consequence of that. Jamaal’s constitution of spirit is different from Khalid’s and the college years of both the young men are markedly different from each other. In Delhi, Khalid involves himself with a political-religious students’ organization finding comfort and cause in the empathies and sympathies of similarly pained young men while Jamaal tries to build a respectable mediocre life for himself, preserving his sanity and his small ambitions. Following Khalid’s death, Jamaal’s consciousness begins to absorb anger building up in him a keen sense of injustice.

Maybe the knife would have been the end of it. Jamaal would have walked to work with *Jimmy the Terrorist* hidden within him, clutching the knife, the grip weakening day by day. Once in a while a certain word, a certain sentence would have brought *Jimmy the Terrorist* rising up into Jamaal’s eyes, only to withdraw, disappointed or diffident. It could not have lasted long. Jamaal was getting older, and some of his contemporaries in town had even married. Or he might have actually cleared the MBA exam. Ambition or domesticity would have dulled his anger, leached it. And in the delight of his children he would in some years have forgotten Jimmy the man who had appeared, fully formed, inside him that ordinary evening. (p.173)

At the climax of the story, Jimmy's *krodha* (anger) results from watching a film and an incident outside the theatre. The consequence of the same is the action of stabbing a man in uniform, an action Jimmy undertakes instinctively, not premeditatedly. While watching the Hindi film *Bandit Queen* (1994) at a local theatre in his town, Jamaal is overcome with disgust and anger at watching the abuse and humiliation of a powerless woman. As he steps out, he sees a local prostitute being threatened and humiliated by policemen – often acting as certified agents of state brutality. When they accost Jamaal, his reaction of spitting is a result of the building up of empathy with the powerless and hatred for the abusers, while recognizing the men in uniform to be the perpetrators of violence on Khalid, his brother. This episode highlights the possibility of resonances between aesthetic emotions and worldly emotions and the differing views of theoreticians on this subject make the explorations exciting. Abhinavagupta has countered Śankuka's views by stating that the state of *rasa* is a heightened state of consciousness, and there is no direct resonance between the emotions on stage and those outside it. He rejects the proposal that the relishing of *rasa* takes place through inference and the imitation of emotions on stage. Raniero Gnoli has pointed out that in Śankuka's suggestion, there is a problem as he does not explain how the process of inference operates in an art form like dance. In Jamaal's case, an identification with the character's situation and experiences in the film stirs his repressed emotions and he feels anger after which on witnessing a similar incident, he is deeply affected. While witnessing the scene on the street, Jamaal, through inference, remembers the incidents on the screen through a reverse imitation. The story of the woman on the street stirs his memory of the emotion of anger that he felt while watching the film. If Jamaal had not watched the film at that point, would he have reacted the same way to the incident on the street? According to Abhinavagupta, the heightened state of consciousness during the aesthetic experience is temporary and self contained. It is the highest point of liberation when the soul has removed all ignorance and has come to recognize itself in its true nature. The question that now arises is whether watching the film was intended to evoke a *rasa* experience and if so/ why was it unable to? It is true that the cinematic text recreates anger in the spectator, but it cannot be identified as *raudra rasa*? If anger was experienced in its purest sense through the *raudra rasa* (furious), it would, as Abhinavagupta propounds, lead to *viśrānti* (rest). A touching base with the primary emotion of anger would make the waves of agitation settle in the consciousness and an individual would be better placed to understand and even accept her/his own life situations and take action in an unattached way. In the narrative, the protagonist doesn't experience *rasa* but, through identification with the character of the victim in the film, experiences an intensification of the repressed anger that he had been holding and his bourgeois ambitions had been suppressing.

Abhinavagupta lists certain obstructions to *rasa* in the aesthetic process which include "immersion in one's personal thoughts" as a component of obstruction (Mullik 265). In the narrative, it is clear that Jimmy is absorbed in his own personal thoughts at the time of entering the theatre. It is also likely that he finds himself unable to align his psychoemotive waves with the experience and the consciousness of others as his sense of social alienation is overwhelming him, a precondition for reaching "an abiding mental state" for the *rasa* experience. It is also important to dwell on the possible reasons for this troubled character to go into the theatre knowing well the real-life contexts for the narrative that abound in sexual violence and revenge. In discussing the effects of extra-fictional or real-life influences or knowledge on the film experience, Gopalan Mullik refers to Vivian Sobchack's views on the matter:

[She concludes by drawing our pointed attention to the fact that] the audiences' extra-textual knowledge of real events in the real world outside in terms of their own embodied and socio-cultural experiences of living in the world remain crucial in judging the status of "events" happening within a fictional film. Any departure from it would disturb the audiences' appreciation of the artwork in question. (Mullik 268)

In the novel, the film is a real Hindi film titled *Bandit Queen*, a dramatic recreation of the life story of Phoolan Devi, a surrendered bandit who was alive at the time of the film's release. In the Indian social context, the story of Phoolan Devi's life of struggle and the figure of a rebel woman taking up arms to revenge her sexual trauma is a dramatic plot in itself. The knowledge of "extra-textual" elements include the persona, her story and the much controversial debate on the director using a body double for the lead actress for a scene involving nudity. Moreover, for the character Jimmy, Phoolan Devi in life and on screen would be seen as a socially marginalized person, reminding him of Khalid and to an extent, himself. The identification therefore works at the level of superimposition of dramatic elements on real life and the stimuli and triggers that come from real-life events for consequent dramatic action (in real life).

In Indian literary historiography, the beginning of *kāvya* is attributed to the legendary *kraunch* episode that stirs Valmiki's consciousness and leads him to compose the *mahākāvya Rāmāyaṇa*. Valmiki witnesses an episode of immense grief (*śoka*) and from this grief follows a beautiful story of love and loss. Valmiki changes as a person, gives up his thievery and becomes the archetypal *kavi*. How does this transformation take place in Valmiki's consciousness? The purified grief of the female bird becomes the source of a story of love and loss. While witnessing the heart rending crying of the bird, Valmiki finds resonance in aesthetic emotions so that the transition is from experiential grief to aesthetic grief. This legend also establishes that *karuṇa* lies at the heart of great literature and that it holds the power to transform the human consciousness. It also highlights how the aesthetic experience (*rasāsvād*) can approximate the religious experience (*brahmāsvād*) but is not the same. Śankuka's theory of inference states that during the aesthetic experience, specifically in a drama, the emotions are realized by the spectator through the act of inference. This inference derives from the imitation of real life emotions on stage. When a spectator watches a performance for instance, of Ram and Sita's *viraha* (separation), the *sthāyibhāva* of *śoka* (grief) is experienced by the spectator through inference. The characters Ram and Sita on the stage are neither real nor unreal but exist in imitation of actual personages of Ram and Sita in the original text. The emotions on stage are also therefore neither real nor unreal but exist in imitation of actual emotions.

Based on this model of inference, Śankuka has suggested that an experience of *karuṇa rasa* can lead to the emotion of *karuṇā* (compassion) in the consciousness of the spectator. Therefore, Śankuka opens the possibility to see how it is possible for a spectator (reader) to move towards *karuṇa* after relishing the *karuṇa rasa*. However, this does not necessarily mean that every aesthetic emotion will have a direct bearing on lived emotions.

In the end of the narrative, in a moment of anger, Jamaal stabs one of the officers, and becomes 'Jimmy the Terrorist' for posterity. The transition of Jamaal to Jimmy, though stemming from *karuṇa* (compassion) that he feels for the helpless woman, yet his actions are grounded in impulse and not an aesthetic *viśrānti* (rest) as idealized aesthetic experience offers. Jamaal's actions are the result of anger, frustration and impulse but take compassion and empathy as their point of origin. Through the psycho-emotive paradigm of understanding response to art, narratives like that of Jamaal provide opportunities for reading and reflecting upon the struggles of individual consciousnesses, isolated in political and social life of the society at large.

In classical Sanskrit aesthetics, the role of the *sahṛdaya* (empathetic reader/viewer) is considered an integral part of the aesthetic process. Theorists have propounded on the stages of aesthetic engagement and the psychoemotive orientation of an ideal reader/viewer. The typology of the ideal critic/reader involves the process of de-cluttering or purification brought about by *sādhana* (meditation and contemplation) and Abhinavagupta's idealization equated an ideal viewer/reader/critic to the position of a *jīvanamukta* or one who has freed oneself in this lifetime. Sundararajan and Raina (2016) have explored the process of aesthetic appreciation of the *sahṛdaya* with parallels from quantum principle of symmetry. In their fascinating study, they



have highlighted the classical as well as modern perspectives on the principles and processes of aesthetic appreciation in Indian and Western traditions. From such studies, the possibilities embedded in the aesthetic process can be contextualized in the current social and cultural realities of the world. A question that naturally presents itself is concerned with the role of the reader/viewer in the present world where digitalization of content and democratization of art debates have made everything accessible to everyone and the proliferation of the reader response theory demands non-conventional and non-discriminatory aesthetic engagement. While such developments point towards breaking social and other forms of exclusivism and hierarchy, they don't engage with the other aspects of classical aesthetics that were concerned with the psychoemotive health of the reader/spectator. In contemporary times, it would be regressive to argue for literature and other forms of art to be reserved for a learned few, therefore, this debate needs to be contextualized in the present times. It may be rewarding to dwell on the role (and responsibilities) of the reader/spectator to align the aesthetic process with the psychoemotive makeup and the effects of the aesthetic process. Classical aesthetics especially Abhinava's postulations dwell extensively on the yogic training for being a *sahṛdaya*, one who is capable of severing mundane ties and immersing herself/himself in the aesthetic experience. In the context of didactic aesthetics influenced by Western theories rooted in Christian ethics and the multiplicity of media in the contemporary world, questions about the aesthetic experience largely concern themselves with the effects of the art experience in material terms. The individual who is engaging (or consuming?) a work of art is a differentiated (not unified) consciousness, and her/his life-situations as well as repressed emotions play out in the aesthetic process. In the novel, Jimmy's mental and emotional health is in a state of upheaval and chaos due to the personal and social developments in his life. In that state, his psychological coordinates are too attached to the life experiences and they make their mark in the aesthetic process too. The story of a woman's social marginalization and sexual trauma and the dynamics of revenge drama that is played out in the film *Bandit Queen* act as objective correlatives for his real life experiences and specific memories of social marginalization and custodial violence. When he steps out of the theatre, the incident of a woman's harassment that he witnesses acts as a trigger and sets off the drama of revenge in Jimmy's internal makeup. The act of hitting a man in uniform goes against the bourgeois aspirations of Jimmy but his anger at the helplessness of women and other marginalized people translates into violence that costs him his name and reputation. If Jimmy was not in a troubled state of mind when he went in to watch the film or if he had watched another film, would the aesthetic process have been the same with the same outcome? There have been recorded incidents of individuals committing suicide after reading certain texts or watching certain films, as also of individuals healing and registering behavioural and even physical health changes due to the aesthetic process, as is being discussed in the emerging discipline of narrative medicine.

In conclusion, it remains an important consideration when contextualizing Indian aesthetics and reading contemporary works of literary or dramatic (cinematic) production, that the purpose and design of every work of art needs to be contextualized too. There are films, novels, dramas and poems composed for political, ideological, activist and other materialist purposes. Classical Indian aesthetics is concerned with dimensions of consciousness that are focused on 'affect' but not in a tangible or translatable sense of worldly behaviour and action. Comparative aesthetics is enabling in clarifying contexts and challenges as well as the relevance of examining aesthetic propositions and contemporary works of art.

In contemporary literary and cinematic/dramatic productions, anger has come to occupy a major role in aesthetic affect. Readings, interpretations and analysis of texts often explore *raudra rasa* in sociopolitical frameworks. Spiritual psychologist Brian Weiss in his book *Messages from the Masters* (2000) points out how we have upheld the 'angry young man' fetish and project



unprocessed anger as an ideal emotional state through films and other forms of mass media. The Osborne effect has transformed into packaging and marketing of anger that sees reproductions in revenge and macabre cult cinema. When reflecting on modern Indian literature, the character of Asvatthama in Dharmvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* (1954) comes to mind. In the play, *raudra rasa* is an abiding *rasa* as the aftermath of war leaves people hopeless and aimless and this void naturally produces *krodha* (anger). Asvatthama's character exemplifies anger and his words and actions are produced as a result of rage that he feels about his father's betrayal. This warrior son realizes, after the war, that his father's death was a result of a half-lie (half-truth) and the defeat of the war sends him into a mad fury of destruction that flouts all norms of dharma. As a result, he is punished by Krishna to eternal pain. This character's anger is born of frustration and despair and his raging soliloquy on stage produces the *rāudra rasa* in the audience. The affective dimensions of this *rasa* do not lead the audience to take political/ideological positions but to a self-reflection as the causes of his anger on stage are circumstantial to which the audience can relate naturally. Deceit, betrayal and manipulation are common human traits and circumstances of conflict/war that bring these to the fore are of common experience and collective memory.

In Greek mythology, the Erinyes (Furies) are personifications of anger or curses and their roles are intimately linked to social morality. One of their features is engendering madness whose elucidation is clear in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532, 1591). The rage of Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (5<sup>th</sup> c. BC) that stems from guilt leads him to blind himself while Orlando is driven to madness from his rage at betrayal. Like Asvatthama, these characters lack self-reflection and take to instant behavioural patterns of destruction (of self and/or other). The savouring of *raudra rasa* doesn't coax the spectator/reader into immediate action but is a psychospiritual space of reflection and meditation. In many spiritual traditions, anger is not seen as a morally negative emotion but a stage of transformation (for instance in Ignatian spirituality). From Yahweh to Rudra and Kālī, god personas and deities are also depicted in angry bhavas. The wrath of god was of particular interest to William Blake and John Donne as appealing in its visceral power. In literature, anger has a universal place and aesthetic approaches have concerned themselves with the cognitive and psychological dimensions of anger in an action-oriented approach. The affect of anger offers an open field of inquiry to explore if aesthetic anger can be seen in non-didactic ways. I end this essay with a reference to the noted Kannada playwright H S Shivaprakash's views on depicting *raudra rasa* on stage and how non-dualism is a context that this *rasa* can be located in:

It is very difficult to produce *raudra rasa* through a work of art as we tend to take moral positions regarding the characters. In *Mahāchaitra*, I tried to place *raudra* in the context of cyclicity of seasons, and not in a didactic way. Between two contending forces in the play, I introduced the character Nilambika who has transcended the duality in the conflict.

At the end of dualism, lies *raudra rasa*. When Shiva prostrates himself to absorb Kālī's anger, an awakening is possible.

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# The Spirit of Walden: Art, Asceticism and Coercion in Paul Auster's Early Fiction

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NIGEL RODENHURST

The image of the storyteller, actually or metaphorically imprisoned because of dominant social conditions, attempting to make an impact on consciousness and avert tragedy from the margins, interacts with the figure of the ascetic writer throughout Paul Auster's fiction. In several novels Auster's protagonists retreat to a small room and emerge as something other than a storyteller, acting within a supposedly "democratic" process. Indeed, the scenario often outlined in Auster's fiction is that the protagonist encounters obstacles to the production of narratives that can influence the consciousness of the reader, and resorts to some form of political activism, coercion or "terrorism". In many respects it could be argued that Auster's interaction with writing, politics and direct political action mirrors that of one of his literary idols, Henry David Thoreau.

As I will outline below, Thoreau's writing and documented career can be taken as an exemplary illustration of the paradox between the literary writer's drive to move readers' hearts and minds as part of the democratic process of publication, and the drive towards coercion, a drive to impose one's own world view on one's subject. This is a true paradox, as often a coercive figure such as a terrorist and a writer can work from a point of opposition to exactly the same political issue, and only differ over which method to adopt. It could also be argued, conversely, that in certain instances the terrorist, in common with the dominant social order, uses methods of coercion to assume total authority over its subject. This may bring to mind Richard Rorty's succinct summary of the central problem of contemporary literary theory as being: "the problem of how to overcome authority without claiming authority" (105). This "Thoreauvian paradox", it will be demonstrated, is present in Auster's early work and could be used to challenge some of the tunnel-visioned "postmodernist" readings that seemed to pervade the critical response.

In this essay, I will first outline how the career of Thoreau can be seen as an exemplary illustration of the competing drives in a literary writer towards asceticism and political activism. After this I will demonstrate similarities in Auster's approach to these subjects before providing an alternative reading of *Ghosts* set in the context of *The New York Trilogy* as a whole, arguing that Auster consciously uses both *Walden* and Thoreau as a literary figure to investigate contradictions which concerned him as a young writer. Having established the presence of these competing drives in Auster's early works, I will conclude by focusing on the way that this tendency was revisited and evolved in later works.

Thoreau's literary legacy rests heavily on *Walden*, his acknowledged masterpiece. This, as most readers will know, is the narrative of Thoreau's retreat to a cabin at Walden Pond, an experiment in solitude at a time when America was in political turmoil. Because of this, he is often stereotyped as an example of the figure of the ascetic writer, extolling solitude, inwardness and study as remedies for social ills on an individual level. The idea that retreating to a cell-like space and living an ascetic, paired down existence encourages ideological self-analysis and assists the participant in confronting her/his inner self (perhaps mirroring the process of reading literary narratives) resurfaces in Auster's fiction frequently. To reduce Thoreau's influence on Auster to such a narrow scheme, however, is to overlook the fact that Thoreau was a writer of manifold contradictions and competing impulses, as Auster himself is well aware.

This is evident in Thoreau's strong support of John Brown, the militant abolitionist who led an assault on Harper's Ferry in a bid to equip slaves with rifles so that they could free themselves. As Brown faced execution and public vilification for taking the law into his own hands, Thoreau made a stirring speech entitled "A Plea For Captain John Brown", defending the felon's "character".<sup>1</sup> Thoreau's own activities in opposition to the government of the day were largely confined to his writing, speech making and his approbation of occasional "civil disobedience" (non-violent resistance), although he did clearly empathize with the impulse behind Brown's actions. At one point Thoreau admits that he does not wish to kill or be killed for political reasons, but that he can "foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable" (842). He concedes that where people strongly disagree with Brown it is often because of his methods, not his politics, and at several points reiterates his intention to spend his own life "in talking and writing" (842). Despite their differing ultimate choice of action, Thoreau sees Brown as a kindred spirit in his stance against slavery, describing him as a "transcendentalist above all" (830).

In publishing *Walden* Thoreau set about the aims of the storyteller as discussed above, hoping to have a positive impact on political consciousness. He did not do so obliquely but by direct appeal in the narrative, detailing his experiment and polemically challenging readers to look into their own consciences on matters relating to slavery, the environmental impact of technology and the American way of life in the period before the American Civil War. It should be acknowledged that Thoreau's artifice as a storyteller is utilized in *Walden* and many critics choose to think of the speaker not exactly as Thoreau himself, but as a radically textualized narrator who narrates his own journey of self-discovery. On one level Thoreau undertakes an ascetic experiment or retreat, a solipsistic gesture, but as the protagonist of Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* asserts a "sensible alternative to the conditions of the time" (16). On another level Thoreau acts in the hope that skillfully written narratives can move hearts and minds, that readers will be influenced. Thoreau remarked of Brown that it was a pity that he "did not make a book of his observations", and in this statement makes it clear that he ultimately saw writing as his vocation, as his genuine chance to make a difference (828). It could be argued that this brief profile demonstrates the ambivalence in the writer's position between hoping to influence his reader against collusion with an undemocratic or tyrannical dominant order, and the undemocratic or tyrannical urge to coerce a change in consciousness through "direct action".

Auster's work, however, is rarely discussed in the context of these different responses to political events, except in the case of *Leviathan*. This is perhaps because the main protagonist (beside the narrator), Benjamin Sachs, resorts to terror, and many of his responses to the politics of the Regan years bring to mind those of the "real life" terrorist Theodor Kaczynski (the "Unabomber"). It could be argued though, that the range of responses to historical events discussed thus far; art, asceticism and direct political action, is investigated throughout Auster's fiction. Indeed, Auster's early experiences as a politically driven young man mirror those of his literary antecedent Thoreau in several ways. Auster came of age in the Vietnam years and was a student at Colombia during the 1968 uprisings. These were in part provoked by the university's complicity with the Vietnam Draft Board but were also a reaction to America's durable racism. Auster was marginally involved in the student uprisings. In *Hand to Mouth* he recalls the extent to which he was politically involved:

In the summer of 1969, I walked into a post office in western Massachusetts with a friend who had to mail a letter. As she waited in line, I studied the posters of the FBI's ten most wanted men pinned to the wall. It turned out that I knew seven of them. (36)

From that time to the present day, Auster has been outspoken about American politics, particularly capitalism and foreign policy, and if one had to fit his comments and attitudes towards successive administrations into any category, one could perhaps describe them broadly as "leftist". Auster has perhaps become a more public figure and certainly a more regular contributor to media interviews since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, which provoked him to heavily criticize the Bush

administration on a number of occasions. Comparing the politics of the war on terror to the political discourse of the Vietnam years Auster told John Reed that he was appalled by the lack of active protest in early twentieth century America:

The thing that shocks me about what's going on is not so much that it is happening – but that no-one is really screaming about it. I would think now, after more than two years of Bush the whole country would be hysterically, passionately against it, but he's rolling over everybody. That's appalling to me. (23)

Auster has also spoken of his sense that all citizens should be politically active within the democratic process and advocated the idea of protest:

I'm a writer, but I'm a citizen. I'm both, and I also happen to have strong political opinions. When circumstances require it, when I'm asked to do something or say something or write something, I do it – as a citizen. (Purgatory, p.95)

In this statement Auster has given support to different approaches to political conditions towards which he feels a sense of revulsion, as Thoreau did in the above profile. His main activity has, however, remained his writing, as Auster has remained committed for over forty years to spending time in his small room studio in Brooklyn churning out novels and screenplays.

At the beginning of the 1980s Auster emerged from a long period of self-imposed exile (touring Europe and writing poetry that very few people read) and published *The Invention of Solitude*. In this semi-autobiographical work Auster introduced his readership to his sense of a small room ascetic existence as an ideal scenario for self-study, and also his version of the storyteller's ideal achievement, giving his endorsement to the potential impact of words and stories. The example is taken, we are told, from the beginning of *The Thousand and One Nights*. King Shehriyar has been cuckolded, and in his disappointment resorts to taking only physical pleasure from women before ordering their execution (150–51). Shehrzad, the vizier's daughter, volunteers to go to the king and tells him a “story about story telling” (151). In the process she delays her execution, but not by directly pleading her case – the function of the story is to “make a man see the thing before his eyes by holding up another thing to view” (152). After being moved by stories within stories the king is a new man. He cancels executions and distributes largesse. The narrator proclaims that Shehrzad's feat is an achievement “with all the unalterable gravity of a miracle”, and asserts that a “voice that speaks stories of life and death, has the power to give life” (154). In Auster's comments that address his approach to writing and citizenship one can detect the Thoreauvian paradox between art, asceticism and political activism.

The above discussion provides a fresh framework in which to approach Auster's early novella *Ghosts*, the second and shortest book of *The New York Trilogy*, in the context of the trilogy as a whole. This trilogy has often been analyzed in contexts of postmodern theory, including the works of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, among others. Marc Chenetier gestured towards the presence of *Walden* in *Ghosts* and the main protagonist's struggle to get to grips with the canonical text. Rather than evaluate the possible influences of Thoreau specifically in this work, however, Chenetier chose to discuss the novella as a meditation on “language, words and writing ... thus prolonging the meditations of Melville and Poe” (42). Ilana Shiloh made the case that Auster refracts the conventions of the detective novel in ways that highlight the existentialist thinking of Sartre. Shiloh also overlooked the direct influence of *Walden* in this novella, particularly in her assertion that “no crime was committed, no mystery was involved, except the mystery of the self” (66). I will challenge this below when I discuss the protagonist, Blue, as the victim of an errant writer's “coercion”. Shiloh's response is typical of the line taken in early responses to *The New York Trilogy*, discussing the genre of “anti-detective” fiction. Alison Russell's reading was underpinned by the idea that the trilogy is “amenable to the deconstructive principles of Jacques Derrida” (71).

This type of critical response is not entirely surprising for a number of reasons. One of these relates closely to the current era of literary criticism, and the tendency of many academics to

foreground the subtext of a literary work, disregarding any perceivable pretext or authorial intentions. Another factor that would encourage such a series of readings is that the first book of the trilogy, *City of Glass*, revolves around a quest for a prelapsarian language in which the protagonist Quinn (also a victim of coercion) identifies a void similar to that found in Beckett's "postmodern" fictions. Indeed, Auster was profoundly influenced by Beckett, a leading figure of the literary generation in which he came of age. Auster told James Campbell that:

You have the sense, when you read Beckett for the first time, that he reinvented the novel, and at the same time made it impossible for anyone to write a novel again. And I was in a sense crushed by him. It took me a while to get out from under the burden of Beckett.

Besides this, each novella of the trilogy could be characterized as stylistically "stripped down" with "bared concepts", as Russell noted (78). Frequent disclaimers concerning partial or imperfect knowledge of the plot, the repeated use of doubles and the "disappearances" of protagonists may also encourage readers to evaluate the trilogy in terms of "postmodern" motifs.

The idea that these novels are "postmodern", simply on the grounds that they may be "amenable" to themes and concerns common to theorists of the late twentieth-century, has already been challenged. As J.M Tyree began to point out, *The Locked Room* could validly be read as an engagement with some of the timeless concerns of authorship, such as neurotic narcissism and fretfulness over reader reception. Tyree based his argument on the novella's acknowledged "borrowing" from Nathaniel Hawthorne's juvenile effort *Fanshawe*, and the story of the novelist's tortured relationship to it. Hawthorne recalled every copy of the novel, itself about a struggling novelist, and destroyed it because he was embarrassed by it. Whilst it is acknowledged that *Fanshawe* is no masterpiece, Tyree pointed out that:

mediocre writing is hardly the worst of man's inhumanity to man. Yet Hawthorne hides Fanshawe almost pathologically [...] as if he really had committed some terrible crime. (77)

Discussing his novels with Mark Irwin, Auster commented that writing for him was a way to "express my own contradictions" (113). Bearing this in mind, and that Auster produced these novels as he himself departed from a long period of exile followed by a small room existence, in which he resolved, to the extent that it is possible, the obstacles and conundrums which faced him as a novelist, it could be argued that the themes of these novellas are "coming of age", or more accurately, "phase of career" related. This "quest" to work out personal doubts and contradictions, could also be used to explain the "stripped down" style of the novels. If Auster expresses his concerns with language and authorship in *City of Glass* and with having the courage to publish and own up to one's own work in *The Locked Room*, in *Ghosts* he attempts to resolve his contradictory impulses towards the aims of the writer and of those who use direct political action. As I will demonstrate in my summative analysis of *Ghosts* below, Auster empathizes with one character's impulse to impose a world view on his reader through "terror", but ultimately dismisses this coercive method as undemocratic and opposed to the aims of the literary writer.

*Ghosts* commences with the narrator presenting to the reader the information that Blue, a private detective, has been given an assignment to watch Black, by a mysterious client called White. Although the location of this stakeout is deemed "unimportant", the narrator decides to set it in the district of Orange, historically related to Walt Whitman and Henry Ward Beecher (9-10). Initially, Blue observes Black reading *Walden*, and makes nothing of it. Blue is endowed by the narrator with sympathetic human qualities, such as being touched at the disappearance of a child, and feeling pleasure at successfully solving a case which brought about a happy reunion between a wife and her amnesiac husband. We also learn, however, that Blue is not self-analytical, and has "never given much thought to the world inside him" (19).

A pattern soon emerges which is similar to that found in *City of Glass*. In this, the first novel of the trilogy, the writer Quinn takes on the guise of a private detective only to be presented with



a strange case that he is at a loss to comprehend. In *Ghosts* Blue is disturbed to find that his usual procedures do not help him to resolve this case, and that he can only surmise what the case is not. He also begins to feel that the words he uses in his report do not exactly fit what is happening, "words do not necessarily work", which troubles him (26). The reader is made aware of a psychological area of repression in Blue's character at an early stage, involving his inability to relate successfully to "the future Mrs Blue", and this side of the character is not entirely attractive. At one point he excuses a sexual encounter with a lady he meets at a bar, by likening himself to a soldier at war, who needs some "comforts" (43). Shortly afterwards, Blue runs into his intended, who has ended their relationship because of Blue's desertion while he was on the strange case of Black. He has tears in his eyes and feels "a fool" (51).

Besides this, we learn that Blue is impressed with superficial aspects of America's historical development, such as the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, the rise of a young black baseball star, and Robert Mitchum movies. The facts are that Blue is secure with his place in the world, as a man, as an American, and has spent little time alone with his thoughts. He is certainly not the type to read novels in order to be spiritually challenged or rejuvenated, as he is aware of no necessity for this. As the case continues, and Black seems to do nothing but work at his desk, Blue starts to ponder subjects such as mortality and the death of his father when he was young. Immediately he feels embarrassed and concludes that this is "what happens when you have no-one to talk to" (31). This in some ways replicates Thoreau's descriptions of his experience of solitude (in the chapter of that name) at Walden Pond, although Thoreau, a convert to self-experiment sees this as something to embrace rather than avoid. As this continues, Blue begins to brood, and at one point is described as harbouring suicidal thoughts (40).

Blue decides to read *Walden*, as a way of staying engaged with Black, but on first impression calls it "blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all" (48). It may be significant that the narrator intervenes here to say that whilst many have found it a difficult book, and although Blue persists, if he had found the "patience to read the book in the spirit in which it asks to be read, his entire life would begin to change" (48). The narrator's assertion here mirrors Thoreau's assertion in *Walden*, that the classics should be read as "deliberately and reservedly as they were written" (312). This compounds the notion that the narrator, the storytelling character who features in *The Locked Room* and ultimately has exercised the demons that prevented him from publishing, is himself a partial convert to Thoreau's thinking on ascetic study and feels that Blue could benefit from the reading experience. It is perhaps at this point that the reader begins to get a sense of Blue being set a coercive challenge. It seems he is being asked to examine himself and his relatively narrow (American) outlook, and consider the implications of a text like *Walden*, which calls for an ascetic quest for self-knowledge. The reader may also be led to suspect, as Blue does shortly afterwards, that Black is behind the whole idea of setting Blue this obtuse assignment.

Feeling oppressed and disorientated, Blue decides to resort to measures similar to those adopted by Quinn, disguising himself as a street person named Jimmy Rose, who begs change from Black and eventually has a conversation with him. As was the case with Quinn, Blue's motives for wanting to speak to Black under a disguise are, up to a certain point, morally justified by his occupation, his lack of success through other methods, and the generic conventions of detective fiction. Black's motives on the other hand are less than clear, but one suspects that he is one step ahead of Blue the whole time. He tells "Jimmy Rose" anecdotes about Whitman, and about Hawthorne locking himself away for twelve years, saying that writing is a "solitary business [...] it takes over your life" (66). Here it seems that Black is trying to impress upon Blue the idea of the writer as a sacrificial figure, devoted to creating art that will affect people, and worthy of appreciation.

The problem with this, if it is Black's rhetoric, and he is a "writer" who wants to make an impact on Blue's consciousness, is that he has gone beyond the democratic process of publishing literature available to all and started to actively coerce Blue, in an attempt force a world view on

to him. Blue himself has started to change as a person, and on more than one occasion after reading *Walden* thinks of his circumstances in ways that relate to the book. When he considers abandoning the case and becoming “free”, he imagines himself “somewhere else, far away from here, walking through the woods and swinging an axe over his shoulder” (82–83). Next, Blue disguises himself as a retired Vaudevillian salesman, and learns that Black is a writer and that he does not know if he will live to complete his book. To this, Blue makes an uncharacteristic philosophical reply about mortality, further evidence of the way in which he is being changed by his experience as a “reader” (81).

Finally Blue convinces himself that Black is inciting him to make some sort of move, and breaks into his apartment. It seems that the book Black is writing is simply an account of Blue’s behaviour, and that he has been entirely dedicated to his “project” with the young detective. Later Blue confronts Black, who is lying in wait with a gun. Black claims that his own problem is that he is “too much in (his) mind”, the opposite of Blue’s original condition (92). It seems he intends to commit suicide, and he tells Blue: “I’ve had my job to do [...] and I’ve done it” (93). He then passively allows Blue to attack him, and Blue apparently beats him to death before disappearing without trace. The narrator concludes by stating that we do not know what happened to Blue after this, but in his “secret dreams” he likes to think that Blue travelled abroad, making one of several enigmatic references in Auster’s fiction to China as a possible destination for his sympathetic characters (96). The fate of Black (does he live or die?) is not judged relevant enough to speculate upon.

In *Ghosts*, Auster apparently presents a similar case to that found in *City of Glass*. A despotic “writer”, in this case Black, attempts to impose his world view upon an unsuspecting dupe, by setting him a case that brings into question the certainties of the “reader’s” subjective outlook. The novella is also similar in that there is a certain amount of ambivalence in the narrator’s response to the protagonists. The narrator clearly, when he describes Blue reading *Walden* for the first time, empathizes with Black’s project and would perhaps like to witness Blue’s conversion from a shallow private detective to one influenced by transcendentalist thought. This is partly achieved, it seems, as Blue does become more likely to think in ways associated with transcendentalism. The possibility of a voyage to China may hint that the narrator hopes Blue will continue his voyage of self-discovery, perhaps with a spiritual experience in the stereotypically “mystical” east.

Furthermore, whilst the narrator does not discuss the eventual fate of Black, he does not wholly condemn him either, as he did with “Paul Auster”, a solipsistic writer who did nothing to help Quinn in *City of Glass*. Indeed, as the last we hear of Black, project complete, is of his passively allowing himself to be destroyed by Blue, he becomes something of a martyr to a cause which is not entirely unsympathetic. The reader is, after all, made aware of Blue’s faults, as a man that felt he was “never wrong” (38). Those with strong opinions that literature can effectively move hearts and minds might enjoy reading as Blue begins to question things that he had previously taken for granted. One is thus tempted to relate Black’s ascetic efforts to those of Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville, all mentioned by this stage in *The New York Trilogy*, in terms of the sacrifice that he has made for his “art”.

An ambivalent approach is thus evident in this early novella to the borderline between challenging readers intellectually through fiction and “coercing” them. This “coercion” can be thought of as either the production of inscrutable, unsettling texts or the act of actually stepping into reality and coercing citizens like Quinn and Blue, who are vulnerable for differing reasons, with fictional “cases”. Whilst Auster clearly understands and shares the compulsion, by his own career and lifestyle choices, and through his fiction, he makes clear his overall preference for and commitment to attempting to affect consciousness through literary narratives. In this respect, *Ghosts* could be re-evaluated as the young novelist’s attempts to “work out the contradictions” implicit in his dilemma, as Thoreau did through his writing. I will now move on to looking at

the ways in which this tendency to meditate upon the outlined Thoreauvian paradox evolves in Auster's work.

It has often been noted that as Auster's career has progressed, while he often returns to his favoured motifs of chance, stories about writers, and stories within stories, his work has become less paired down and with a more solid grounding in a quantifiable time and place. Arthur Salzman pointed out that *Leviathan* at the time was Auster's "most realistic novel to date", but because of the narrator's frequent disclaimers concerning imperfect knowledge added the caveat that:

Whatever document results from the novelist's efforts is essentially a record of incomplete transactions whose authority must be taken under advisement. (162)

The broad outline of the novel is that Peter Aaron, a writer, narrates his account of the life and demise of his friend and fellow writer Benjamin Sachs. Sachs is characterised as a writer with clear political views, having been imprisoned as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. He is also described as being profoundly influenced by Thoreau, who he admired for "his attitude of remorseless inner vigilance" (29). The Thoreauvian paradox is in evidence at an early stage of the narrative as Aaron recalls meeting Sachs for the first time and sensing his divided nature: "he resembled Ichabod Crane, perhaps, but he was also John Brown" (13). The motivation to act in an ascetic and politicised way, and the contrast between the drives to write effective narratives and to act as an activist, are the underlying forces at work as Sachs completes his trajectory in the narrative from prisoner, to writer, to man in small room and finally to terrorist.

Auster falls back upon the technique employed throughout *The New York Trilogy* of using doubles who have some similar characteristics but in other ways are diametrically opposed. Salzman does not fully acknowledge this as he argues that the relationship between narrator and protagonist is similar to that of *The Locked Room*, as in this novel the narrator realises that his "success—indeed his identity — is inextricably bound to Fanshawe" (166). As I will contend shortly, Aaron is partially sympathetic towards Sachs and at times in awe of him, but an important aspect of the narrative is Aaron's assertive censure of Sachs's actions and mentality. As mentioned, Aaron is himself a writer, and like Sachs has hit a metaphorical brick wall in his career. Sachs, we are told, gave up on writing novels in the early 1970s as a "sham", and reverted to writing essays, a perhaps more polemical form than good fiction should be and certainly less likely to influence the American public in the late twentieth century (55). Aaron persists with his career, struggling at working in a bookstore and working on his translations before his lack of success leads to the demise of his marriage to Delia. This storyline parallels Auster's own career trajectory as outlined in *The Invention of Solitude*, as does his retreat to a small apartment that Sachs approvingly calls "a sanctuary of inwardness, a room in which the only possible activity was thought" (63). Faced with his solitude and isolation Aaron, unlike Sachs, never turns his back on writing.

Aaron tells us that Sachs's early novel, "The New Colossus", seems to assert that Thoreau was correct in his thinking (we may perhaps assume regarding ascetic self-analysis, individualism and solitude, as well as "civil disobedience") and that America had "lost its way" (43). We also learn that the dominant emotion "was anger [...] against America, anger against political hypocrisy, anger as a weapon to destroy national myths" (44). When Aaron describes the political scene of America in the Regan years, he could hardly be more simpatico with Sachs:

The era of Ronald Regan began. Sachs went on doing what he had always done, but in the new American order of the 1980s, his position became increasingly marginalized. It wasn't that he had no audience, but it grew steadily smaller and the magazines that published his work became steadily more obscure. Almost imperceptibly, Sachs came to be seen as a throwback, as someone out of step with the spirit of the time. The world had changed around him, and in the current climate of selfishness and intolerance, of moronic chest-pounding Americanism, his opinions sounded curiously harsh and moralistic. (116)

As is often the case in Auster's work, the direction of the narrative changes abruptly because of a barely plausible chain of events that a fatalistic character responds to. In the case of *Leviathan*, Sachs falls from a window ledge at a July 4<sup>th</sup> Party. Whilst he escapes death, both Aaron and Sachs himself see the fall as a kind of metaphorical fall from grace, described in various religious terms. Aaron and another artist character, Maria Turner, rally around Sachs and try to encourage him to persist with writing as a constructive and therapeutic response to his underlying antagonisms and recent trauma. Sachs retreats to a small writing studio in Vermont and Aaron is optimistic that the product of this ascetic retreat will be "a great and memorable book" (158). Sachs's life then converges with that of a terrorist, Reed DiMaggio, and after further traumatic events he becomes a convert to the thinking that inspired DiMaggio. He confesses that he has begun to feel like a "hypocrite", "ashamed" about being a writer and not having the "balls to act" (252-53). Sachs then becomes the "Phantom of Liberty" and carries out a series of bombings on replicas of the Statue of Liberty. Again, Aaron is partly sympathetic towards the "Phantom". He dismisses him as a "crank", but concedes that he only wants "America to look into himself and mend its ways" (243-44). Aaron also shares the bomber's appraisal of the symbolic meaning of the statue, and how it symbolizes:

The best of what America has to offer the world [...] however pained one might be by America's failure to live up to those ideals. (242)

To the very end of the narrative, Aaron expresses empathy towards Sachs regarding the political scene in America and the dwindling impact that novelists could hope to have. At the conclusion Aaron remarks that while Sachs is in hiding "the Berlin Wall was torn down, Havel became president of Czechoslovakia, the Cold War suddenly stopped", all allusions to the collapse of the historical left, and as Sachs continues to carry out his lone protest Aaron admits that wherever Sachs was "I was with him now" (266). At the point at which Aaron had learned that Sachs was the bomber, however, he had assertively condemned Sachs's methods, if not his impulses:

but who on earth picked you as the conscience of the world [...] last time I saw you, you were working on a novel. (250)

Ilana Shiloh discussed the way that Sachs may have been influenced in his bent for political protest by linking Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" to Sachs's conscientious objection to Vietnam. Shiloh goes on to assert that this non-violent resistance is "diametrically opposed to terrorism", and that when Sachs later changes his tactics, he forsakes the teachings of his former idol (112). Again, this overlooks the mention of John Brown in Aaron's original description of Sachs and also Thoreau's qualified support of Brown. If Sachs is described as an overly fervent young man, Aaron also reveals his similarity in appearing to have harboured strong, almost militant drives. Sachs's wife Fanny recalls seeing him at college and thinking he was one "of those young men who was either going to kill himself or change the world" (52). To conclude, the Thoreauvian paradox is in evidence in *Leviathan*, as two writers faced with similar conditions, and with similar feelings towards America during the Regan years, share similar impulses to write, but also to assertively criticise the way their readers think. Where Aaron differs from Sachs it is a question of methodology rather than politics, and whilst Aaron shrugs off his early tendency to look up to Sachs, he persists in his assertive support of many aspects of his thinking.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The 'Plea' was delivered in Concord Town Hall on the evening of October 30<sup>th</sup> 1859, while Brown was imprisoned and awaiting execution. As Henry Seidel Canby noted, the "usually ineffective" Thoreau was highly animated, and Emerson testified that the Thoreau was heard "by all respectfully, by many with a sympathy that surprised themselves" (827).

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# Occupying Absence: Mahmoud Darwish's *In the Presence of Absence* as a Cosmopolitan Space<sup>1</sup>

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ZAYNAB ALI

[T]he language you hear brings your heart back to its senses: No, this is not my language. Where is the eloquence of the victim recalling his long suffering in the face of the misery of the moment when enemy looks enemy in the eye and shakes his hand insistently? Where are the voices of those murdered, old and recent, demanding an apology, not only from the murderer, but from history as well? Where will meaning go when opposites meet? (Darwish 126)

Exilic writing takes form and flight in Mahmoud Darwish's *In the Presence of Absence* (2011) as the narrator speaks into existence abstract notions of home and exile in an eloquence that carries the sorrows of the exile through translation. For an exiled-Palestinian from the age of seven, Darwish occupies multiple identities: he is aware of lands that go beyond Palestine, and yet the longing for his homeland pulses within him. *In the Presence of Absence*, translated by Sinan Antoon, is a farewell by the Palestinian poet: a farewell to his exilic life and to his dying-self.<sup>2</sup> In this twenty chapter book, Darwish creates a presence for his self, the Arabic language, and for the Palestinian people. A presence that is constantly at the brink of erasure. What does identity look like for an exile who is not allowed to live in his homeland? To an exile that resides on the borders of multiple nations and cultures? For Stuart Hall, identity is "embedded" in the cultural meanings of an imagined community (28). Darwish creates this imagined community in and through his book by being a vernacular cosmopolitan. Hall considers vernacular cosmopolitanism as a means through which one can understand others and a way of portraying the multiple identities in a world that is "aware of the limitations of any one culture or any one identity" (30). Through the use of vernacular cosmopolitanism *In the Presence of Absence* creates a new way of expressing the identity and home of the silenced. Home, for the exile, is neither rooted in a homeland nor dependent on the physical features of the world. The manner in which the text, writing, and words create a new space—a new field—upon which the exile can look back upon their life as an exile showcases how 'home' for the exile, specifically in chapter sixteen, cannot be pinpointed to one certain place or location. Home and life for the exile does not follow the linear form of the tree with roots that are easily distinguishable and identifiable, but rather the text and the spaces on the page create new routes that map a new homeland for the exile on the page. These maps, as theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in relation to a rhizome, "fosters connections between fields" (12). The routes that the rhizome is composed of allow the reader to witness Darwish as a vernacular cosmopolitan that constantly tries to translate and renegotiate his position between cultures. Thus, Darwish creates a new vocabulary necessary to build a new homeland: one that he is the owner and host of on the page (Darwish 84).

Words are tools used to either restrict or liberate; words are either the weapons of destruction of identities or the building blocks of materialized memories. Through his writing style, Darwish creates a space upon which the abstract notions of home, belonging, and identity can materialize through imagination. From the macro—the genre, structure and form of the book—to the micro—the figurative language in the book—the writer speaks into existence the abstract notions he is robbed of in the physical world. For the exile, the text, the spaces on the page, and form, is home: a home created through the building blocks of words and a home that continues to build as the



reader flips the pages. This home creates a new vocabulary for vernacular cosmopolitanism to be presented to the reader and allow multiple identities to flourish. This home, the text, for the exile is a place he is the owner of, while the reader, in contrast, is the visitor, who ventures through the narrator's walls and boundaries. This book becomes a homage to his past, a legacy for his land, and a presence amidst the threatening absence.

The elegy, a genre that reflects or laments on the dead, has several subgenres including the self-elegy. In a self-elegy the individual imagines their death (Dyer 1452). In addition, in the "Translator's Preface" of *In the Presence of Absence*, Antoon highlights self-elegy as a subgenre that has been "established in classical Arabic poetry" with origins beyond pre-Islamic times (6). The self-elegy poems are described as examples of "redeemed subjectivity" and the "construction of selfhood," for the poets create "ciphers of themselves for the edification of the like-minded" (Cavitch 97). By bidding farewell to his dying self and speaking to his impending death, Darwish reflects back on his life and creates images of his life that were otherwise absent. These immortal images serve as a place where readers across history and time can gather upon and witness his life and connect with their own. In the opening lines of chapter sixteen, the narrator states: "A long time elapses between exiting and entering, which allows you to bid farewell to exile with appropriate melancholy" (121). By separating his dying-self from his living-self, the narrator speaks to and about his dying-self—the self that is being exiled from the living—in a manner that allows him to give identity to this exiled part of him. Exiles are seldom given the space to speak for their existence, they are brushed over with wide strokes that paint them with colours that the colonizers wish. Verena Conley in "Chaosmopolis" states that Ackbar Abbas criticizes Ulf Hannerz for his use of "one world culture" for it hints at the domination of one culture over all others (129). By separating the exiled from the self, Darwish challenges the notion of one culture, for even within a country there are varying experiences and by being able to put these experiences into words allows for individuals to take control of their narratives and become vernacular cosmopolitans that translate their lives into narratives others can read and interact with on the page. Homogenization has no place in Darwish's book. By characterizing the exiled-self, Darwish gives voice to this existence and creates a space on paper where a cosmos, a "mental, social, or natural territor[y] ... for a sense of existence" (Conley 129), is conjured. The narrator alludes to the battle for recognition between the dying and the living self. This implies that the exile is challenged by those who have been the face to the world: the ones that the world sees—the living—dominate those who have passed on.

The narrator states that he spent "as many years in exile as [he] did in the homeland" (125). Thus, home for the exile is in both the homeland and in other countries he has spent his life. By exiling his dying-self in this self-elegy, Darwish creates a "habitable space" through which the exile is able to live in his self-created home on the page (Conley 136). The exile is no longer at the mercy of others to dictate whether or not he belongs in a land. Instead, the narrator provides this part of himself in order to build the home he has been searching for. Edward Said describes the exile as being cut off from their land, roots and past. Said describes exiles as having an "urgent need" to "reconstitute their broken lives" ("Reflections" 177). For the narrator, his identity is split: the part in exile and the part in his homeland. By splitting the exile and placing him in the form of his dying-self, the narrator attempts to create a place where his dying-self can construct a new land on the pages of the book.

Darwish refers to his dying-self as "you" thus, placing distance between Darwish, the storyteller, and Darwish the exile. This allows for the narrator to speak for and to his exiled, dying-self as a character separate from himself. He also refers to traveling back to his homeland with his exiled, dying-self and states: "Returning, we are returning, without a lofty anthem or a bold border" (121). Here, the exile and the narrator are grouped, identities conflating into one: a hybrid existence—illustrating that exilic identities do not come to an end but rather are continuous

elements of one's identity. To be an exile in the past is to be marked by exile in the present and future. Both narrator and exile are rejected not only from their homeland, but also from the rest of the world, and then further from a homecoming. The narrator puts life into the exile's thoughts, articulating the inarticulate: "You wonder: What kind of linguistic or legal wunderkind could formulate a peace treaty and good neighborliness between a palace and a stuck, between a guard and a prisoner" (192). In this statement, the narrator questions what language can be used to provide a peace treaty for exiles who have been subjugated to violence and homelessness.

According to Conley, chaomopolites do not believe in "the resolution of opposites" (136). Thus, through a questioning of the type of peace treaty and talks that would resolve the differences between two opposites, the exiled and the one who exiled him, the narrator challenges the idealization of a resolution. Instead, through the presence of the exile on the pages of the book, his wonderment, thoughts, and emotions displayed by and spoken by the narrator, the book creates a new space that is provided by the "culture of disappearance" (Conley 135). Once the exile's home disappeared, identity became split, and a new space with new opportunities is created by Darwish in *In the Presence of Absence*. Hall asserts that vernacular cosmopolitanism consists of new vocabulary that speaks for those that do not have their existence displayed. Through the self-elegy, the narrator places the exiled part of himself onto the page and into a newly created space upon which the exile's thoughts and opinions are displayed unapologetically for the reader to enter upon and observe. The exile, who prior to this, was homeless, is given a home onto the page once he is distinguished from the body of an individual who is exiled from his homeland and existing in the world as a traveler.

Darwish continuously asks the question of what identity appears like to a Palestinian. He wonders at what the world thinks when a Palestinian is a poet and when a poet is a Palestinian: "In the first instance: it is to be the product of history, to exist in language. In the second: to be victim of history and triumph through language" (126-7). For Darwish, exile is the "poet's journey through a poem," but it is not a journey that is marked by a leaving and a returning but rather a journey that is expressed through words and imagination for others; it is a journey that highlights the strength of the exile who relies on itself to grow (82) and uses the senses, such as smell, and the power of imagination, to connect memories along the route. The structure of the book, its fragmented narrative, and the form of the narration, with its combination of prose and poetry, portrays the way the text is a meeting ground of opposites. The structure further transforms the reader as a passive consumer of the book into an active consumer that pieces together the journey of the narrator's homecoming. Darwish's text portrays the way citizens connect on and through the page to form an assemblage, and how the exile's life and conception of home is rhizomatic rather than linear: every place and every moment in the writer's life as an exile creates a route. These routes are interconnected and stem from and bleed into one another. For the smell of one place, as Darwish states, reminds the exile of the fruits that grow in another, and the physical presence in one land is shadowed by the longing for another. The fragmented narrative reflects the manner in which the exile's identity is disconnected from his past and his roots (Said, "Reflections" 177). His identity is not one that resembles a tree with identifiable roots, but rather it is a rhizome, which contains routes that he took in his life trying to find a place to call him: yet failing to do so because every place is a temporary reprieve and home always seems out of reach—a horizon unable to be met. These routes portray the various moments in his life. By describing his journey back and through Palestine, Darwish emphasizes the transient nature of the life of the exile. The exile's life is not rooted in one place, but rather it has multiple spots of entry and existence: the exile's place of residence is in multiple nations in the world. Deleuze and Guattari likewise define a rhizome as a structure that is interconnected (7). Similarly, Darwish's life is marked as a journey that is always in movement and connected to different cultures and nations other than his own homeland, Palestine. Even when Darwish assumes that he has returned back

to his homeland, to his roots, he realizes that he does not feel at home, for he cannot fit in with the people or in the ever-changing land marked by occupation. What is homecoming for the one whose home has become unrecognizable? Darwish exhibits the fragments of a homecoming neither celebrated at home nor familiar to the exile. A root implies that there is one origin, but the life of the exile, and the home created in Darwish's book portrays how life consists of routes that touch upon other nations and is cosmopolitan in character: for it transcends borders and regards the world as a city—a cosmopolis (Conley 127).

Conley describes the cosmopolis as existing due to the interactions of individuals with one another. According to Conley, these interactions create a "temporary assemblages in real or electronic space ... composed of many different parts but will have different inflections, depending on one's position in the globe" (131). Similarly, the non-linear narrative of the book allows for one to begin reading at any given point and derive new meanings from the position one began reading from. Said states, "Nations themselves are narrations" (Introduction xiii), and Darwish's narrative is able to "delineate the contours of the homeland," and break through the occupation, the rigid structures that hold Palestine captive, and the impenetrable wall that conceals his occupied homeland from the rest of the world. He is able to present the identity of a Palestinian exile by transcending boundaries and bringing into existence what the world is pretending has disappeared (Sazzad 3). Palestinian identity is expressed in the crossings of place to place, and is an expression of an exile from land, history (Mattar 103). As Conley theorizes, the culture of disappearance allows for new opportunities and forms of existence to manifest, and that is what Darwish's book represents.

The combination of poetry and prose alters the way the reader interacts with and views the page. Darwish uses the page as a new space upon which his identity can be built. Exilic writing has been identified as writing that "eschews traditional theories of publicity altogether" (Bernard-Donals 39). For the speaker must willingly approach the reader, the other, and share their vulnerabilities with the possibility of rejection (Bernard-Donals 46). Furthermore, the exile's mother-tongue is often stolen and re-purposed to oppress, to colonize, and to restrict. It is often an odd sensation: to have one's mother tongue be spoken to with in order to further colonize their language and their land. To be told that the land one's heritage stems from, belongs to, and is rooted in, no longer has space for one's footsteps is to be told that settler occupation is very much in the present. However, to be exiled from one's home in one's own language, by another who has recently acquired the language to articulate the unimaginable (occupation) is yet another blow. Thus, language becomes a tool, either for restriction or liberation. Exiles, often use the language of poetry for the latter, for poetry allows them to "break with the monopoly over history granted to the cognitive regiment of phrases" (Bernard-Donals 47). Poetry transcends historical domination of one group over another, for it allows a new means through which one can express that which was not articulated up until now. Instead of being filled from top to bottom with continuous prose, Darwish's book occupies the space on the page differently: there are spaces in between paragraphs, blank spots where prose is expected to fill the page. Thus, it is in the way the narrator fills the pages, creates a home and an identity that allows the exile to revel through the combination of prose and poetry.

Said, in reference to exiles, states that what while most individuals are aware of the singular, one culture, one setting, and one home, exiles are aware of the plural, and it is this "plurality of vision" that signals an "awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that ... is contrapuntal" ("Reflections" 186). The independent voices of both prose and poetry meld together in chapter sixteen in order to portray the multiple identities of the exile. The exile crosses borders of nations and in Darwish's text, the narrator blurs the line between prose and poetry in order to express his notions of exile. Furthermore, by alienating the reader away from a traditional prose-piece and by placing the reader in an unknown, fragmented, narrative, the narrator turns readers into exiles, for they are exiled from the comforts of an easy narrative. The reader now turns into the

exile for “whom the entire world is a foreign land” (Said, “Reflections” 185). Thus, the writer creates a new vernacular to displace the reader.

In addition, readers of the book are aware of the fact that they are reading a translated text of Darwish’s original book, which was written in Arabic. This isolates the reader. They are aware that the words on the page are translated words delivered by a translator. Thus, the reader occupies the position of an exile unable to reach familiar places: for the reader this is the familiar position of assumed superiority granted by the assumption that their reading will be able to distinguish the codes and moral values reflected in the book. However, through a translated reading, the reader is confronted with their own lack of knowledge of the Arabic language and of having complete access to the original sentiments through the translated work. Thus, readers become the “outsiders” to the narrator’s Arabic community (Said 177). In the “Translator’s Preface,” Antoon explains her rationale behind her translation. Her methodology is explained as followed:

Blocks of poetry, written in meter and rhyme, were set apart from the rest of the Arabic text in the original. I have kept this distinction in the translation. The rest of the text, while not in metered poetry, pulsates with syntactic rhythms and frequently includes internal rhyme. Although not without effort, I have tried, whenever possible to render this translation. (8)

For Antoon, the purpose was to abide by Darwish’s main concern: to give Arabic prose its “maximum potential.” According to Darwish, he was “interested in celebrating language and making it dance ... [he] wanted to free the demons, doves, and birds of Arabic” (Darwish 8-9). In regard to being an outsider to a community’s language, Said relays the story of listening to his friends Eqbal Ahmed and Faiz Ahmed Faiz recite poetry in Urdu without translation. He states that although he was at the disadvantage of not being able to understand what was being said he nonetheless enjoyed listening to the beauty of the language. Antoon states that as a translator it was difficult to “translocate this celebration [of language] to another language, but it had to be done” (Darwish 9). The translated book is “an act of love for Darwish and homage to his poetry and genius... It also celebrates his eternal presence in his words and his long life in us, his readers” (Darwish 9). By translating his work into another language, Antoon allows for those who are not a part of the community built by Arabic-speaking readers to interact with the writer and witness the beauty of his writing, albeit through a translator. It allows for Darwish’s words to spread and to come into contact with the ‘other’ to his exilic self. Translated works open new worlds for readers: allowing them to become witnesses through the materialist practice of engaging with “others” and to become a part of another’s journey.

Furthermore, the translation allows for readers to connect with Darwish, through is poetry and prose, and to become citizens of the world “who dare to recognize the other in themselves and who enable the construction of a cultural and political cosmopolis that consists of diverse citizens” (Conley 128). In regard to approaching the “other” and establishing connections between oneself and the other Rabindranath Tagore creates a link that travels beyond compassion and traverses into the personal: Tagore states that individuals read about others in order to understand more about themselves (50). It is through a translated version of Darwish’s book that the reader gains a better understanding of their position in the world and gain further insight on how Darwish is a vernacular cosmopolitan whose experiences are translated from one language to another. Subjectivity is formed when one’s “I” comes into another’s “you,” thus it is when the reader’s “I” comes into contact with the translated story of Darwish’s “you” that the reader can gain better insight into their own “I”: what is their own stance on exile? What is their own position to home? What is their own ethics of witnessing another’s destruction? What can they do to raise awareness for the continued occupied presence that has rendered 7.98 million Palestinians as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs)? (“Palestinian Refugees”). Unable to directly help the refugees, exiles, and IDPs across the world, reading about their displacement emphasizes the need to self-reflect and to raise awareness for the atrocities present all around the world. This

awareness can come in the form of research, discussions in academic circles, and can result in the resistance to the erasure of roots buried deep in the lands that have been occupied.

Darwish identifies exile as a "misunderstanding between existence and borders" and as a "bridge between images" (85). Through the use of metaphors and figurative language, the poet expresses his identity in imaginative terms. His identity is a creation built from imagination and placed upon the page for the imagined community to gather upon. The exile becomes a connective device that brings together distorted images of lands that have been pushed to the margins. Through his writing style, Darwish creates a space upon which the abstract notions of home, belonging, and identity can materialize through imagination. Imagination is a reoccurring theme in the text for it is a way the exile is able to express his identity and his perception of home. Thus, through the use of figurative language, the writer speaks into existence the abstract and reins through the power of expression. Darwish uses metaphors and figurative language in order to "lift [the record of Palestinian] aggression up to an aesthetic level" and as a response to the violence that tore up his homeland" (Sazzad 2). Furthermore, similar to the way a metaphor and figurative language allows for Darwish's writing to beautify the violence that is present in his country, the style of his writing prevents one from reading the narrative and instantly grasping the 'center' or the meaning of the text. Instead, readers are forced to analyze and deconstruct the imagery. Thus, the "center" of the narrative is "indefinitely postponed, so is the exile's homeland (from which he presumably derives his ideas and his imagery) postponed (Thomson 500). Darwish uses the Palestinian land in chapter sixteen as "Raw material" used as a canvas upon which he creates images that allow for the experience of being in Palestine to be present (Bowman 53). Darwish carries his community and his identity as a Palestinian exile and constructs it onto the page through metaphors and imagery. Thus, he transcends beyond the borders of "national identity, and reach[es] a community of people who are external to any sense of "Palestinian-ness" (Mena 113).

The narrator asks "[W]hat can a poet do before history's bulldozer but guard the spring and trees, visible and invisible, by the old roads?" (126). He stakes claim to the Palestinian land and uses trees, horses, and fruits to describe the emotions of returning 'home': "You will kiss the earth, embrace tree trunks, and utter sacrosanct words from the rhetoric of the victor of the prisoner" (124). He describes the way the "Returnee's imagination" takes a hold of beautiful images, "which atone for the sin of obligatory and semi-obligatory departure. And that alone is recompense enough for our exodus" (122). He also states: "The apple is biting the form without being punished for acquiring knowledge" (122). This can be interpreted as Darwish, as a writer creating a book that transcends the boundaries of a given form, is able to produce the knowledge of being an exile through the combination of poetry and prose, without having an other dictate what he can and cannot do. He is the owner of his words, his book, and the home he creates through the words in his book.

The image of the sunset is a reoccurring one that serves to connect geography with history and in turn to identity. The narrator describes the sunset with its rays "embracing the palm fronds" before he reaches Gaza. The sunset's fiery color "descend[s] from them [the palm fronds] to adorn the sea's undulations as they give in to an eternal dalliance" (128). He is told by his friend to enjoy the sunset in al-Arish because the way the rays hit the sea in Egypt differs from the way they hit the sea in Gaza since the "sea there is colonized" (128). This reflects the manner in which the sea impacts the way individuals view their place in the world. Since the sea in Gaza is surrounded by Israeli land, restrictions mark the location, although nature is considered to be free of occupation. Darwish reiterates this point by connecting land and sea to the existence of individuals. Similarly, Conley states that "New ways of existing that can no longer be conceived outside the environment have to be invented [for the chaomopolite]. Existential territories of chaomopolites henceforth have to include the question of global degradation of humans and the environment" (137). Thus, the chaomoplite is also concerned with environment as they are with citizens of other nations.



Darwish's way of existing is connected to the environment in which he lives in, and his freedom and the freedom of his Palestinian people is marked by nature.

With land and sea occupied, Darwish uses metaphors to take back what was taken from him. He uses metaphors readers are familiar with in order for them to connect with the Palestinian situation. Conley states that humans "are in exchange with each other and with their environment, from which they cannot be separated in the first place" (128). The narrator states that he had written about Gaza before he had laid eyes on it, based on the way it had presented itself: "a fort besieged by sea, palm trees, invaders, and sycamores. A fort that never falls. Gaza is pride taking pride in its name" (127). Thus, homeland to the narrator's exiled self is a land that was and is still out of reach, similar to the way the land is distant to the reader. His identity is a creation built from imagination and placed upon the page for the imagined community to gather upon. It is a place where the reader as the 'other' to the narrator's 'I', can enter into dialogue with the narrator by setting foot into his home.

Words are the bricks with which an imagined community can be constructed and welcomed upon and they are the tools Darwish uses to create a community through the use of the sub-genre of a self-elegy, the merging of poetry and prose, and figurative language. *In the Presence of Absence* is a meeting ground of multiple imagined identities through vernacular cosmopolitanism. This vernacular cosmopolitanism is expressed through new terms and forms that allow the exile's multiple identities to materialize. Said states that the exile must "cultivate a ... subjectivity" ("Reflections" 184) and that is what Darwish does: he cultivates his subjectivity through figurative language about the land in which he is both at home and a stranger to, he cultivates his self through the transcendence of form, the mixing of both prose and poetry, and he cultivates his identity through the self-elegy which allows him to characterize the exile in him and give it a persona for the world to witness on the page. In Darwish's text absence is given importance as much as the occupation, for it is in disappearance, in absence, that new forms can be created. As opposites meet Darwish asks: "Where will meaning go?" To which Conley answers: there is no solution, there is only movement towards new way inventions of existing (137) – an invention Darwish delivers upon through the portrayal of identity in relation to the environment: fusing both body and land for eternity and defying blockades and restrictions that dictate otherwise.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the terms "Occupying Absence" in the title is three-fold. First, to express the occupation of an exile who is regarded as an absentee in their homeland. Thus, the exile occupies the persona of an absentee. This can be regarded as the occupation *of* absence. Second, to express the occupation of Palestine by Israel. Palestinian land continues to shrink as Israeli borders and walls push against it. Absence in this case is a result of occupation: occupation *for* absence. Third, words in Darwish's book occupy empty/absent space on a page in order to conjure the notion of home. Thus, this occupation takes the form of occupation *in* absence. In all three instances, absence is grappled with. Absence becomes a place charged with cosmopolitanism: for the exile occupies the persona of an absentee who carries homeland across foreign borders and interacts and enters into dialogue with the citizens of other nations. Further, common discussion on the Palestine and Israel brushes over the concept of land: the land Israel occupies is rich with the footprints of Palestinians whose presence still lingers in the air. The land they built their homes on is



the same land that was brimming with life of those now exiled. Finally, as words occupy the empty spaces on the page, they become tools with which the writer builds a home for Darwish, an exile, to express his identity and for readers to come into contact with his home and his homeland. The words create a dialogue amongst readers and between the narrator and the reader.

- <sup>2</sup> This paper refers to the narrator as Darwish, himself, because *In the Presence of Absence* is described by translator as a self-elegy in which "each section ... is a self-contained unit and addresses a theme or a phrase in the author's past" (Darwish 6).

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# Guilt: A Space of Liminality and Dialogism in Dostoevskian Aesthetics

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REA HAZRA

He with his Thunder: and till then who knew  
The force of those dire Arms? Yet not for those  
Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage  
Can else inflict, do I repent or change,

.....

What though the field be lost?

All is not lost; th' unconquerable Will

.....

To bow and sue for grace

With suppliant knee, to deify his power

Who from the terror of his Arm so late

Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,

That were an ignominy and shame beneath

This downfall; ... (93-96, 105-106, 111-116)

John Milton apparently had no design to heroise Satan into the Shelleyan Prometheus. However, ever since till this day the presentation of Satan's character by Milton has been unparalleled though controversial. What is it that still makes this presentation unprecedented? Surely, we are not in the Puritan Age and definitely not speaking from England as the central point of reference so, the question of morality, whether Satan is indeed wrong or wronged, is no longer very lucrative in a post-modern futurist era. Yet Milton's Satan lures us repeatedly not only because we can blasphemously identify with him but for a more indispensable aspect – that of perspective. Milton's intention regarding the characters of his epic might have been different from its reception but what he successfully does is to establish Perspectival writing in literature. Satan is no longer a character but transforms into a space of interactions, possibilities and transitions, no longer a dominating presence in the foreground. One can comprehend his feelings of guilt and shame: a portion of his previous self, but at the same time one can also feel his transitioning or 'becoming' his other selves. Milton's Satan, then, may be thought of as a liminal space: liminal because it allows perspective and context, allows interplay of several factors so that both the character and the aesthetics of Milton's epic mutually nourish and embrace each other, abandoning the notion of purity.

Fyodor Dostoevsky is often hailed as the undisputed champion of "the insulted and the injured" much like Milton's Satan. His world is one of crime and punishment, guilt and expiation, God and the Devil. Dostoevsky is intriguing not because he sides with the devil or god, but because he shows the devil in god and god in the devil. Hence, Dmitri Karamazov who is immersed in debauchery is the one who is wronged, guiltless, guileless, is the one before whom the pious saintly priest Zossima reverentially and symbolically prostrated and it is the vile Svidrigailoff who is capable of conquering an idea he always feared, as Raskolnikov broods, "Was the desire to live so difficult to conquer? Did Svidrigailoff, who feared death, surmount it?" (427). The dominant emotion in his novels is guilt and it is on the edifice of guilt that Dostoevsky constructs his aesthetics. This paper proposes that Guilt becomes a liminal, interstitial space in Dostoevsky's aesthetics allowing for the development of both, the emotion as well as the artistry, giving his

novels their unique essence. This paper will primarily concentrate on *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* in tracing the formation and consequences of this “third space” which “enables other positions [perspectives] to emerge,” as Homi Bhabha explicates in his interview with Jonathan Rutherford (211).

Guilt, in Dostoevsky, is never a conclusive, whole and unalloyed emotion. It is always adulterated by excesses, ambiguities and is not exclusive only to the ‘sinful’ adults, but ‘innocent’ children too are equally capable of this intense and complex emotion. Dostoevsky is so pre-occupied with guilt perhaps largely due to his personal circumstances and experiences. Having wished for the death of an abusive father and seeing it actually realized, having shared the inimical savage imprisonment conditions in Siberia alongside hardened criminals, being a part of a brutal and gruelling mock-execution – Dostoevsky could comprehend the unfathomable depths of human emotions, especially that of guilt. Guilt, for Dostoevsky, seems to be a given and inescapable human condition probably more than the Original Sin in Christianity. His views on Christianity or organised religion have always been a nebulous area but the issue of guilt prevails distinctly. Speaking of Christ, Ivan Karamazov, in “The Grand Inquisitor” scene, voices an extremely profound iconoclastic debate:

Whom hast Thou raised up to Thyself? I swear, man is weaker and baser by nature than Thou has believed him! Can he, can he do what Thou didst? By showing him so much respect, Thou didst, as it were, cease to feel for him, for Thou didst ask far too much from him – Thou who hast loved him more than Thyself! Respecting him less, Thou wouldst have asked less of him. That would have been more like love, for his burden would have been lighter. (261)

Christ’s sacrosanct actions are questioned very convincingly but that is an issue of belief, faith, theology and even philosophy therefore relative, subjective and debatable. However, what strikes one as inevitable is the condition of man, his “burden”, his suffering, his guilt is perpetual if not more heightened by the sacrifice of Christ and the sense of guilt seems active on both sides – Christ is, here, guilty of being incapable of loving man as he is unjustly expecting him to rise above his base nature, beyond his ability of comprehension to His stature of love, while man is guilty of misunderstanding and crucifying Christ who loved them so much that he suffered an excruciating death at their hands for their salvation, guilty of being unworthy of Christ’s death. Guilt reduces Christ to human fallibility and realizing his unworthiness, his guilt, man is elevated to divine humility. The motives of the actions are secondary, but guilt becomes a necessary threshold upon which agency, activity, transformations, exchange, ambiguities, contradictions, subversions of both parties come into play thereby bringing in perspective, contextualizing and realigning differently, changing the very nature of the aesthetics under consideration. It is from guilt that the whole Dostoevskian aesthetics begins to shape itself.

*Crime and Punishment* is a work anchored in guilt and it is quite unquestionably presumed that the guilt is felt for the crime committed and punishment is meted out to atone for the crime and overcome the undesirable feeling of guilt. All of this is of course one way to make sense of the novel. Another way might perhaps be to investigate whether the feeling of guilt is directed towards and follows because of the crime, whether the person considers the unpleasant action (to the other characters or the readers) as ‘crime’ or whether there is ‘the’ specific crime to which he attributes his sense of guilt, whether this feeling or emotion of guilt is imposed on him ; what occurs within this emotional space and how this space brings about a metamorphosis. In the most obvious instance in *Crime and Punishment*, that of Raskolnikov’s intended murder of an old pawnbroker and the unintended murder of her half-sister, one begins to see how guilt works out in Dostoevskian aesthetics. Through most of the novel one witnesses Raskolnikov’s nervous anxiety, restlessness, delirious condition, unsettling dreams as his much required ‘suffering’ and guilt which endear him to the readers. However, the reader is completely bewildered when Raskolnikov confesses to Sonia that he feels no guilt for murdering a parasitic old woman who in

his eyes was more of a 'criminal' than he is. His guilt is of other things. He says at various junctures of his confession: "I longed to dare, and I committed murder. All I wanted was to do some daring thing, Sonia; that was my sole motive!" (330); "I longed to know if I was vermin, like the majority – or Man, in the full acceptance of the word – whether, in fact, I had the power to break through obstacles; if I was a timorous creature, or if I had the right –[to kill]" (331); "Did I really kill the old woman? No, it was myself I killed! – it was myself I have irrevocably ruined!" (332); "He was ashamed before Sonia; he felt he had acted contemptibly towards her."; "What principally humiliated him was that he, Raskolnikov, should be so utterly lost through an error, the consequences of which he must submit to if he wished for a moment of calmness." (426); "He owned to one fault only – his feebleness in confessing;" (427). If scrutinized these utterances certainly have overtones of guilt – guilt of not being worthy enough a man according to his idea of Man, guilt of being a "vermin", guilt of murdering his being, guilt of not being courageous enough to confess, of losing his sanity due to an "error" and guilt of treating Sonia with contempt due to his own weakness and wounded pride. Guilt is all-pervasive, all encompassing but what one also realises are two other significant dimensions. One is the dimension of perspective and context. Raskolnikov never for once repents his deed or suffers from remorse of taking an innocent life and terms it only as a fault, an "error", an "experiment" (332). He says that if he had been able enough to justify and maintain his power he would have been hailed as one of the great men:

Undoubtedly, many benefactors of humanity, who have not inherited power, but have attained to it, should have been punished for the very first of their steps; but these people prevailed, and are justified, whilst I have not known how to shape my steps; consequently, I was wrong in making the attempt. (427)

This gives one a perspective, a lens through which one looks at Raskolnikov and cannot but treat him with sympathy as a tragic hero, not a diabolical criminal. Raskolnikov himself perceives that his guilt is an imposed one, a constructed one that he does not feel. In her enlightening book, *How Emotions Are Made*, Lisa Feldman posits and observes that the brain constructs emotions, perceptions or rather concepts that are formed by sifting through past experiences and trying to fit the novel information barging at us into one of the already formed concepts to reduce effort and increase utility. Therefore, when novel unknown impressions confront us, we experience "experiential blindness" (26) before we can fit it in and experience the world according to 'our' reality or what she calls "hallucinations" or "simulations":

Simulations are your brain's guesses of what's happening in the world. In every waking moment, you're faced with ambiguous, noisy information from your eyes, ears, nose, and other sensory organs. Your brain uses your past experiences to construct a hypothesis—the simulation—and compares it to the cacophony arriving from your senses. In this manner, simulation lets your brain impose meaning on the noise, selecting what's relevant and ignoring the rest. (27)

The guilt we impose on Raskolnikov is nothing better than a convenient construction for us to make sense of his consequent suffering. To think in Foucauldian terms the dominant discourse of guilt gets precedence over the peripheral ones. However, it is discourse that also makes marginal utterances like Raskolnikov's idea of guilt or non-guilt possible. His guilt is a moment in time when we experience "experiential blindness" and a moment when we realise the constructedness of reality, that emotions are not universal and that people feel and conceptualise differently even if exposed to the same phenomenon.

This brings us to the second dimension – it is because one has acquired perspective does one begin to view guilt as being an emotional space which makes way for other emotions/concepts to constitute it. Guilt is a liminal space where the transition is still in progress, where the process of 'becoming' is still underway. In feeling guilty Raskolnikov has traces of his prior self which committed a certain deed for which he feels guilty as well as traces of his evolved other self who

acknowledges the transgressive acts hoping for a sort of redemption. It is in this in-between-space that Raskolnikov is actually thrust into activity, into agency, into the assertion of his own volition as Janko Larvin astutely observes: “. . . what man is after is not “rational” happiness, but the intensity of life he obtains from the affirmation of his will and of his own ego, even if he had to distort the whole of life for such a purpose” (45). This ego or volition cannot be asserted without suffering or guilt. It is in this space that he acts, decides, takes upon himself the task to come out of the mire, to participate in his own ‘becoming’. His guilt, we must remember, is not the murder of the pawnbroker but the murder of himself, of his being a “vermin”, of not having the courage to either confess his fault or to continue walking on his chosen dignified ideology. Unless he feels the guilt of all of this, he could not have been stirred into the confession he makes to Sonia and the imprisonment he suffers in Siberia which are necessary to his resurrection, to his salvation. This vigorous activity on the protagonist’s part, necessitated by the ‘third space’ of guilt, is essential for mutual and ceaseless construction or development of the plot simultaneously bringing alive the characters – both of which are indispensable to the aesthetic understanding of narratives. A liminal space is also a vague space of ambiguities, contradictions, incoherence and subversion. Raskolnikov’s utterances, as mentioned above as well as his other verbal and non-verbal utterances, reveal the contradictions, ambivalence, subversions and incoherence he exhibits. While confessing to Sonia he says his motive was to provide a better life to his mother and sister and come into possession of some money required direly. Soon, he contradicts himself that the sole motive was the longing to “dare”. Again, he knows he has behaved contemptibly to Sonia yet he continues to remain peevish and distant to her during his incarceration in Siberia. Previously he thinks that confessing is cowardly but later he says his only fault lay in his “feebleness” to confess. It is also in this phase or space of guilt that he subverts conventions and makes room for the excesses of his motives and ideas. His dreams, deliriums, confessions all manifest the incoherence, or ‘rootlessness’ if you will, that living in this interstitial space elicits. The issue of ambivalence within this space brings about a significant departure from the way we conventionally understand emotions. For many, emotions are water-tight compartments categorised and named (perpetuated within discourse) meticulously and arduously into rational cabinets though the ones naming them insist on their ‘irrational’ ‘illogical’ nature. Here, Dostoevsky shows his genius as a psychologist-artist who builds his entire aesthetics on emotional experiences and brings in through his characters not only a polyphony of voices organically evolving, each having its own validity, with relative non-interference of the author but also demonstrates dialogism within emotions thereby breaking hierarchies, divisions and particularizations, making emotions spaces of plurality. Raskolnikov’s guilt is not just a single blob of emotion, rather a complex. There are numerous strands (intercourse and interaction of the several ‘Others’) of diverse sensations, emotions that constitute his guilt. His guilt is constituted of shame, humiliation, failure, cowardice, anger, conviction, indifference, hope as well as different physiological states of being like dreaming, convulsions, deliriums. He feels all of this because he is continuously pitched against changing contexts, be it social, political or personal.

*The Idiot* is steeped in guilt. Not only does each character exhibit unique reasons of guilt but each consciousness of guilt itself consists of scissions and multiplicity. Two important characters and a few other minor characters will be discussed to better comprehend this dialogism prevalent within emotions. Afanasy Ivanovitch Totsky, “loved and prized himself, his peace and comfort, above everything in the world, as befits a man of the highest breeding. No destructive, no dubious element could be admitted into that splendid edifice which his whole life had been building up” (38). However, he is a paedophile and sexually abuses an orphaned child of sixteen who grows up to become Nastasya Fillipovna, his mistress. Yet Nastasya was this chaotic “dubious” element in his life, the Medusa who petrifies him with her gaze of ridicule, loathing, spite and erratic calculative behaviour so that he is afraid of her, wants to get rid of her, marry an honourable woman and



maintain his reputation as a charitable man. Again, he does not feel guilt because of how he ruined a child but “might even gratify his vanity and gain glory in a certain circle by means of her” (39). Yet, at Nastasya’s twenty-fifth birthday party, Totsky relates an anecdote that reveals his idea of guilt and how his guilt is a polyphony or complex of other emotions and ideas. The episode is about how he railed and abused a vindictive former old neighbour and later learnt that she was infact undergoing the last throes of passing away at the very time he was abusing her and he had walked away not knowing the fact. Then he describes the effect this has on him. He felt guilt and could not overcome it. Along with it fear became associated as he got superstitious and attended her funeral mass. However, with time his guilt only intensifies he declares. He begins to realise the harrowing predicament of the isolated old woman and understands her malicious nature, he reflects philosophically on life and humanity being flies dashed about by fate. Interestingly, he also says that his actions were somebody else’s, an Afanasy Ivanovitch that the mature one now seems to abandon and think of as another, his double, “I’ve long looked at my action as though it had been another man’s, I still regret it. So that, I repeat, it seems positively queer to me; for if I were to blame, I was not altogether so.” (136) Later he also eases his conscience through charity. So here, we find a fine example of how varied a complex guilt can be. In his case guilt of a worse deed than this is veiled under this narrative through which he tries to be in denial of that perpetual sting that he feels. His guilt involves fear, superstition, the element of time that acquires precedence which controls the intensity of the emotion, philosophical reflection, a splitting of the persona, expiation and ultimately denial. This space becomes a transformative space but is animated with contradictory energies. The other most significant character is of course Prince Myshkin. He is ‘the idiot’ and is the epitome of selflessness, goodness and infact possesses a keen sense of discernment and articulation unlike an ‘idiot’. He is the one who is always suffering (both physically, as he has epilepsy, and mentally) and is almost murdered by his rival, Rogozhin. Yet, he too is guilty. He mutters to himself, “Am I to blame for all this?” (202). Myshkin’s guilt is profound and agonizing because he can comprehend and acknowledge it. His guilt is that of unwittingly entering the chaos surrounding Nastasya Fillipova, Ganya and Rogozhin’s relationship. Nastasya only loves him because he respects her for who she is. She rejects his marriage proposal, though it would redeem her wretched life, and throws herself recklessly at Rogozhin because she does not want to ruin a child (Myshkin) like she herself once was. Being with Rogozhin was worse than death and she would rather be with him than destroy Myshkin’s life. This, Rogozhin knew too well and became the reason he nursed abhorrence towards Myshkin as he says:

She is afraid of ruining and disgracing you; but I don’t matter, she can marry me. . . .She would have drowned herself long ago, if she had not me; that’s the truth. She doesn’t do that because, perhaps, I am more dreadful than the water.” (194-95)

Myshkin soon realizes he is the cause of a lot of suffering, his guilt is his good-ness, honesty, his selflessness at the same time his betrayal, mistrust and indecision that other perspectives bring to light about him. It is because of this liminal space of guilt that Myshkin’s character becomes convincing, that allows his ‘becoming’, that is crucial to the plot progression. It is perhaps imperative to look at a child’s guilt as Dostoevsky does not impose ‘childhood’ on them as adults do and gives children equal dignity and valid perspectives. Ippolit is the eldest consumptive dying illegitimate son of General Ivolgin (who already has a family) and his mistress Marfa Borissovna. Kolya, Ippolit’s friend and half-brother, says about him:

He is frightfully touchy, and I fancied he’d feel ashamed with you because of your coming at such a moment...I am not so much ashamed as he is, anyway, because it’s my father but his mother. It does make a difference, for there’s no dishonor for the male sex in such a position. But maybe it’s only a prejudice that one sex is more privileged than the other in such cases. Ippolit is a splendid fellow, but he is a slave to certain prejudices. (120)



Ippolit's guilt encompasses the universal guilt thrust on women for being women, his guilt is a space of interaction with the guilt of his mother, his own shame, his invalid condition, his prejudices. It is a complex in which many voices both societal and personal are in dialogue with each other.

Guilt as a liminal space in Dostoevskian aesthetics and as an emotional complex within which dialogism itself is vibrantly functional may be appropriated from Myshkin's own words, "I kept fancying that if I walked straight on, far, far away and reached that line where sky and earth meet, there I should find the key to the mystery, there I should see a new life a thousand times richer and more turbulent than ours." (52) This horizon is the threshold, the space of liminality, of transition, of identity crises and formation, of "turbulence" yet filled with vitality and activity. This is the region of Guilt that "resists any closure or unambiguous expression and fails to produce a 'whole'. It is a consciousness lived constantly on the borders of other consciousnesses" (Robinson).

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# Austen, Adaptation and the Subcontinent: Postcolonial Critique in *Bride and Prejudice* and *Austenistan*

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SABINA AKRAM

**Abstract:** This article considers the adaptability of Jane Austen in South Asia by carefully and pragmatically comparing two contemporary adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). By focussing on *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) and *Austenistan* (2017) this article argues that Austen's universal themes can be translated into any cultural environment. It considers the time period in which both adaptations have been produced and demonstrates how family and dancing are used to for postcolonial critique. Ultimately, this article will establish the appeal behind Austen's timeless masterpiece, and where Austen is situated in contemporary South Asian culture.

**Keywords:** Jane Austen, postcolonial, adaptation

When Henry Austen wrote the first 'Biographical Notice' about his sister, Jane Austen, for the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818, he clearly thought his words would be the last on the subject: '[s]hort and easy will be the task of the mere biographer. A life of usefulness, literature and religion was not by any means a life of event' (Austen 29). As far as Austen's family was concerned, the story of her authorship was over, a few of her remaining letters were bequeathed as keepsakes, while others were simply destroyed or forgotten. The partiality of Austen's family served, what Kathryn Sutherland labels, as a 'mix of careful policing, rivalry and absence of information' (62) to protect her image and reputation. Austen's novels went out of print and her siblings aged and died secure in the belief that the public's curiosity regarding their beloved sister had been satisfied. Yet, more than two hundred years later, Austen's fame and readership have continued to grow worldwide. For literary scholars, her works inspire theoretical, historical and cultural approaches and continue to offer fresh insight into the literary criticism surrounding Jane Austen. She continues to be an important pedagogical influence and inspires an inexhaustible source of critical studies, explored and written from cross-disciplines. Popular appreciation for Austen varies from the modern-day reader to a committed Janeite, and her works are now considered to be part of both high culture and popular culture. Austen, put simply, has become a commercial phenomenon and cultural figure.

It is not feasible to prove that Austen's popularity is greater than any other author's of a literary 'classic' work, but it is possible to demonstrate the diverse and wide-ranging magnitude of her influence. Austen's presence in contemporary popular culture has often been observed and explored, and she is known as much through film and television adaptations of her stories as through the novels themselves – revered by non-readers, readers and scholars (2). Her six completed novels are among the best-known, best-loved and most-read works in the English language. Austen's works have been translated into a multitude of languages; her novels have sold millions of copies worldwide and continue to be printed today. Many critics, like Claudia L. Johnson, have suggested that the reason for this is because her plots and themes provide a refuge for readers when the contemporary world becomes too much for them. Austen is pertinent because her novels focus on issues that continue to dominate many people's lives today. Her universal themes, such as class, courtship and family, contain timeless insights about human nature and can be translated into any cultural environment, ranging from twenty-first century British culture to contemporary South Asian culture.

In the words of Joseph Conrad, ‘what is all this about Jane Austen? What is there *in* her? What is it all about?’ This question has insightfully been addressed in recent years by several scholars such as Claire Tomalin and Rachel M. Brownstein. Though Rudyard Kipling considered her ‘England’s Jane’, she is now, in fact, everyone’s Jane as she is part of today’s multilingual and multicultural society. Adaptations of her novels have been produced in both the West and East. The beauty of Austen’s novels lies partly in their clever opacity, complex irreducibility and witty manner, which has led to their adaptation for screen several times over the years. John Wiltshire, in his introduction to *Recreating Jane Austen*, claimed ‘[r]emaking, rewriting, “adaptation”, reworking, “appropriation”, conversion, mimicking (the proliferation of terms suggests how nebulous and ill-defined is the arena) of earlier work into other media is an important feature of the current landscape’ (2). In contrast, Andrew Wright believes the reason why her works have ‘often been tampered with’ (421) is because it renders ‘Austen in a dialect or patois intended to entice the demi-literature or those of presumably short attention spans’ (Ibid). Although my view is not quite as cynical as Wright’s, he is correct in suggesting that the tampering, so to speak, of her works is targeted with a certain audience in mind. Fundamental elements of Austen’s plot, such as class and gender, will inevitably be adapted to appeal to the audience. However, there is an on-going debate whether Austen’s works need to be adapted as certain audiences can already identify with the structure, plots and characters of her novels. Claire Harman has claimed that

an article in the Jane Austen Society Report for 1962 showed that the pupils of a school in Nigeria had no trouble understanding the marital imperative of *Pride and Prejudice* [...] *Bride and Prejudice*, Gurinder Chadha’s 2004 Bollywood adaptation of the story, tapped into the same relevance to contemporary Sikhs – a relevance lost to contemporary Westerners (245)

Amar Nath Prasad expresses a similar view to Harman on this debate. He states that Austen portrayed ‘women in Great Britain [as] never socially or traditionally bound like Indian women [...] their suffering is not so intense or heart-touching like that of Indian women because of the liberty they enjoy’ (14). Prasad is suggesting that Indian culture is the only one to suffer from traditional and social expectations, while Harman is claiming that marital imperative is a significant concept lost to contemporary Westerners. In doing so, Harman is indicating that, ultimately, only Sikhs can identify with this theme in an Austen novel like *Pride and Prejudice*. This is simply not true; marriage is seen as an obligatory communion for South Asia, including both Indians and Pakistanis – Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus alike. The appeal of adapting Austen is that her novels focus on themes that are identifiable: love, happiness, heartbreak and societal pressures. The social restrictions seen in her novels have been adapted – from an interracial romance in *Bride and Prejudice* to single, modern Londoner in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* – to increase its appeal so it continues to be contemporary and relevant. These two different, but overlapping, cultures inform this essay, which seeks to examine how subcontinent narratives, such as *Bride and Prejudice* and *Austenistan*, introduce critiques of the West by using Austen’s universal themes such as family and class. The purpose of my essay is to extend and update our understanding of the growing body of Austen centred fiction by South Asian women and women of South Asian descent, as well as Austen’s contemporary cultural popularity, by drawing on Felicity James’ argument that Austen adaptations and retellings demonstrate ‘how her writing continues to thrive across boundaries of period, genre and place [while] she continues to be firmly located in a very specific English landscape’ (132), ultimately asking how is Austen situated in South Asian contemporary culture?

There has been a subcontinent Austen phenomenon emerging in recent times through the form of screen adaptations and literary fan fiction, whereby her recurrent themes – family pressure, gender inequality and tension between love and economic standing – have become a particular strong contemporary resonance. South Asian cinematic adaptations have been produced for three different Austen novels: *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (*Sense and Sensibility*), *Bride and Prejudice* (*Pride and Prejudice*) and *Aisha* (*Emma*). In the last year alone, there have been a plethora of

publications by authors of Indian and Pakistani descent. They have reworked Austen's stories so that they are now set in a contemporary South Asian society – either in India, Pakistan or as immigrants living in the West. Sonali Dev's novel, *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors*, is set among wealthy Indian immigrants in San Francisco; *Ayesha at Last* by Uzma Jalaluddin is based during the midst of the Muslim Diaspora in Toronto; *Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal is set in contemporary Pakistan while *Austenistan*, a collection of seven short stories edited by Laaleen Sukhera, includes both contemporary Pakistan and the West. Sukhera points out that the subcontinent Austen resurgence is due to the fact that 'Austen's world is our world; in Pakistan, we often feel as if we're caught between the twenty-first century and the Regency. We don't just empathize with the social pressures and constraints that the Bennets and the Dashwoods endure; we live them' (488).

In 2014, Sukhera founded the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan, which began as a small literary circle consisting of middle-upper class Pakistani women who shared a mutual love of Regency era fiction. Originally known as the Jane Austen Society of Islamabad – the city where Sukhera resided – interest soon spread throughout the country and the name changed so that it was more inclusive. Labelling the society a 'journey of possibilities', Sukhera discovered that Austen's world was much like her own and that of other Pakistani women. The society's humble beginnings have led to a socio-cultural movement that inspired dialogue, celebrated Austen's work and produced a literary homage in the form of *Austenistan*. Inspired by characters and settings from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Lady Susan*, *Austenistan*'s seven short stories are all set in contemporary Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and England and have been written by members of the society. Reworking old classics, the stories all detail modern-day Pakistani women 'de-exoticizing representations of Pakistani and South Asian women while channeling candor, humor, and sensitivity in a manner that we hope Ms. Austen would approve of' (Sukhera 487). Though the settings are contemporary, the problems encountered by the Regency-era heroines closely parallel the society Sukhera and her co-authors experience in Pakistan and the book explores the implications of combining Austen with South Asian popular culture. In her foreword to *Austenistan*, Caroline Jane Knight writes that this book 'is an anthology inspired by Austen's writings, characteristics, and settings, written by women who, in many ways, have far more in common with Jane's world than modern western readers' (x). This is achievable because the characters and themes of her novels can be perfectly structured within a contemporary Pakistani society. The seven short stories that appear in *Austenistan*, all told in first-person narrative, vary in tone but certain themes pervade in each: the omnipresence and imposition of marriage, matchmaking and courtship, the preoccupation with materialistic and superficial aspects of a person's character and appearance, the preference for and familiarity with Western culture and the insertion of, and commentary on, social situations.

Like *Austenistan*, *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) explores the implications of combining Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) with South Asian popular culture. The film's director, Gurinder Chadha, suggests this is achievable because the characters and themes of *Pride and Prejudice* can be perfectly structured within a contemporary Indian society:

[t]he combination is possible since the themes of Jane Austen's novels are a perfect fit for a Bollywood film. I chose *Pride and Prejudice* because I feel 200 years old, England was no different than Amritsar today. Once I had set up the idea that the Bennets would become the Bakshis from Amritsar, it was easy to adapt the novel (Marhur).

It is clear to understand that Chadha's own experience has led her to believe that India is no different from the Regency Period. One of the reasons for this is the way in which South Asian society view marriage. It is regarded as a culturally and socially approved relationship between a man and woman and seen as a social institution, wherein individuals make a commitment to one another, and therefore, legitimise a sexual and economic union. This is similar to, if not exactly like, the view held by Austen's society, who believed women must marry a man with a good

fortune in order to have a secure and comfortable life. The opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates people's attitude towards marriage: '[i]t is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (Austen 5). This establishes the framework for the narrative of courtship and class issues that will serve to pervade the story. Like Austen, the film's title *Bride and Prejudice* suggests instantly a strong gravitation towards a subject of marriage. Therefore, both societies focus on the relationship between marriage, money and social status, which is why *Bride and Prejudice* is able to adapt the novel in a convincing manner, and fit within the context of 1790s English society. In spite of this several aspects of *Pride and Prejudice* have been changed to accommodate the transference from the eighteenth-century English countryside to twenty-first-century India, and it is these adjustments, such as the adherence to Bollywood convention, adaptation of class, the role of the father and the critique of the West.

*Bride and Prejudice* is set in modern day Amritsar, London and Los Angeles. The scope of the locations enables Chadha to critique the West, particularly America, in several aspects. By recasting the role of Bingley as a British-Indian, Chadha is representing Britain in terms of its immigrant identity, while white British identity has been reduced to a single character- Johnny Wickham. However, *British identity is evident throughout the visuals of the film. England is first identified by a panning shot that covers everything from Big Ben to the mosque, and later Buckingham Palace is seen in the distance through a window.* Recasting Fitzwilliam Darcy as an American entrepreneur distinguishes the re-envisioning of white British imperial identity strongly in the film and, in doing so, Chadha effectively shifts the focus from Britain to the U.S. She insists the reason for this is she did not 'want Darcy to be English, [...] because of Colin Firth and his performance in the BBC television adaptation' as she 'did not want to put that pressure on a British actor' (Aftab 2004). Despite this, it is clear to see that by casting Darcy as an American, the U.S is now targeted as being the imperial power, with London being no more than a stopover from Amritsar to Los Angeles.

*Bride and Prejudice* was released in 2004, a year after the invasion of Iraq and a time were America was not looked upon in a favourable manner. Chadha adapts Austen's critique of the patriarchal family to critique the contemporary Western world. By celebrating the family to critique the West, Chadha portrays the Bakshi family as having both a narrative and moral core. Will Darcy acknowledges the superiority, and unity, of the Indian family lifestyle. When asked what he likes about Indian culture, he replies: 'I think it's nice the way the families come together' and contrasts this with his own dispersed, broken family. Chadha's focus on the family unit is, in part, due to Bollywood conventions. Bollywood places an emphasis on an individual's social life and structures the 'characters in a web of social relations of which kin are the most significant' (Granti 77). Lars Eckstein has acknowledged that the 'revival of Austen's works and the world of Bollywood cinema are hardly incompatible as a first glance would suggest, but rather that they are in several respect an ingenious match' (51). Austen's views on society are compatible with the ideologies, structures and plots that are created by mainstream Bollywood films (Eckstein 46). Bollywood films usually re-establish the values of a typically middle-class family as love interests are integrated into the cultural norm (Ibid). For example, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun...* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2003) are three of the most popular films of the last twenty years. All three films express family values as being, ultimately, more influential than romance. This is very similar to Austen's moral universe wherein individual love and desire is subordinate to moral values and rules of conduct. In fact, it is possible to view *Bride and Prejudice* without any prior knowledge of Austen as its characters and narrative pattern are entirely inclusive within a well-established Bollywood tradition.

Families within many of Austen's works are hardly utopian and as Claudia Johnson has shown, a significant part of Austen's critique lies in her interrogation of the supposedly benevolent institution of the family: 'fathers, sons, and brothers [...] may be selfish, bullying and unscrupulous' (10). Critics have commented that adaptations, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*, foreground heterosexual



romance at the expense of feminist critique in what Deborah Kaplan describes as ‘the harlequinization of Jane Austen’ (178). Kaplan explains that the ‘focus [of] a hero and heroine’s courtship [is] at the expense of other characters’ (Ibid). Ultimately, a modern Western audience seem to favour heterosexual romance over family. However, *Bride and Prejudice* is quite the opposite: it foregrounds family over heterosexual romance. It significantly recasts the Bennet family, in particular its patriarch, and presents Mr Bennet as a sensitive and kind father whose role in the family’s misfortune is continually downplayed. For example, the law of entail is at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*. Upon Mr Bennet’s death, Longbourn– the family’s estate– will be ‘entailed in default’ (Austen 27) and passed into the possession of Mr Collins, which is why ‘[t]he business of [Mrs Bennet’s] life was to get her daughters married’ (Austen 7). However, the film erases Mr Bennet’s role in his daughter’s financial plight and omits the nature of entail altogether; the Bakshi family’s financial situation is a function of the global economy and Mr Bakshi’s commitment to India. In the film women are protected by the family structure, but in the novel women’s economic disenfranchisement occurs precisely through the patriarchal family system. *Bride and Prejudice* has removed the patriarch from direct responsibility for the poverty of women and, in doing so, removes a fundamental element of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The depiction of the family is due to *Bride and Prejudice*’s post-colonial critique. Chadha has explicitly spoken about the film touching ‘on American imperialism, the way the West looks at India and what people regard as backward or progressive’ and ‘question[s] the audience’s Eurocentric attitudes’ (Aftab). By contrasting the cohesive Indian family (the Bakshis) with the fragmented Western family (the Darcys), the film is indicating that in its quest for material success, the West has lost its sense of family. The closeness of the Bakshis is part of the film’s challenge of U.S superiority. To emphasis this point, the film has removed the characters of Mr and Mrs Gardiner, who in the novel are an implicit critique of Mr and Mrs Bennet. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Gardiners play an important role as uncle and aunt, for they give Elizabeth advice, comfort and practical assistance that ought to be forthcoming from her parents. In order for *Bride and Prejudice* to maintain its idealisation of Mr Bennet, the Gardiners are completely left out. Beth Lau has argued that ‘Austen’s happy endings feature utopian communities, much like those in other Romantic texts, in which a perfectly matched couple and a handful of like-minded friends create a society, with the unworthy kept at bay’ (264). Elizabeth and Darcy do just this. They establish their life away from the Bennets, with Jane and Mr Bingley soon following suit, they,

remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to her mother and Meryton relations was not desirable even to *his* easy temper, or *her* affectionate heart [...] he brought an estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and Jane and Elizabeth, I n addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other (Austen 310).

In the final paragraph of the novel, the reader is told that: ‘[w]ith the Gardiners, they [Elizabeth and Darcy] were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them’ (Austen 312). The Gardiners are seen in a parental role, and this is important to the novel’s critique of the patriarchal family. The novel ends with the Gardiners in mind; however, as they have been excluded altogether from *Bride and Prejudice*, the film closes with Mr and Mrs Bakshi, sharpening Chadha’s point on family. Will Darcy looks over at Mr Bakshi for approval before embracing Lalita, indicating that Mr Bakshi is the patriarch of the family and his opinion is and always will be respected and valued. In addition, *Bride and Prejudice* has dramatically improved the characteristics of Mr Bennet’s personality. While in the novel, Mr Bennet consistently amuses himself at the expense of his wife, there is only one such instance during *Bride and Prejudice*. When Mrs Bakshi lectures her daughters on the importance of good behaviour during Mr Kholi’s visit, she says: ‘It’s very important to make a good impression. Stand straight. Smile. Don’t talk unnecessarily, and don’t say anything too intelligent’. Upon hearing this, Mr Bakshi mutters under his breath, ‘It’s a shame she only practices selectively what she preaches’. However, this is



said with a conspiratorial wink at one of his daughters. Apart from this one instance, he is consistently kind, and instead of exposing his wife to ridicule, two scenes are invented where he attempts to shield her from public embarrassment.

The art of dancing performs several important functions for both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bride and Prejudice*. Laurie Lyda has pointed out that '[d]ance patterns emulate courtship rituals, marking dance as a microcosm for courtship and marriage – two main themes of the novel'. As marriage was necessary in Austen's England, and a good match was considered essential, occasions to meet eligible men and women were limited. Assemblies and balls provided an arena for introductions, thereby facilitating the opportunity for courtships to be pursued. Peter Knox-Shaw has pointed out that during the Regency Period the quest for a social partner was uneasily saddled together with the life of civil refinement (86). To substitute his claim, Knox-Shaw cites a passage from Richard Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry* (1805), whereby Knight claims that dance is a form of expression to 'straddle these divided worlds' (Ibid). This is noticeable within the central courtship of *Pride and Prejudice*, when Sir William Lucas tries to persuade Darcy to dance and Darcy replies, 'Certainly, Sir; – and it has the advantages also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. – Every savage can dance.' (Austen 24). Darcy is dismissive towards dancing, associating the art with savages and carelessly betrays a pride in his performance at Meryton. His refusal to dance is dressed up in principle and rises from the determination to avoid any entanglement in what he considers to be inappropriate company. Subsequently, the issue of class is reinforced. The importance of dance is revealed in *Bride and Prejudice* in a similar manner. Asian weddings are joyous occasions that are epitomised by traditional dancing. The most frequent type of dance is Bhangra, which is generally related to the middle and lower classes of society. Bhangra is a dance that was constructed by Punjabi farmers to celebrate the coming of Vaisakhi – a Sikh festival, with specific moves of Bhangra reflecting the manner in which villagers farmed their land. Will Darcy sees Bhangra as being an 'easy dance' that looks like someone is 'screwing in a light bulb with one hand and patting a dog with the other'. Chadha is once again displaying the ignorance of Darcy, who has failed to respect the Indian culture. Therefore, Chadha has employed a similar scene from the original text to critique the West and exploit the clash of cultures.

In a similar manner, characters in *Austenistan* are expected to uphold standards of beauty that have been adopted from the West. These percolated ideals perpetuate a societal insecurity that they are, by nature, unattainable – the impossibility of attainment only enhances the desirability. Arguably, this contributes to the concept, though irreversibly intertwined, often stressed in the book that Pakistan and European society (in particular high-brow) should not mix. The paradox is evident in 'On the Verge' when Roya exclaims, "'A bhangra? At your ball? At Avondon Hall?" [she] said, hoping the Gainsborough on the nearby wall couldn't hear [them]" (Sukhera 164). Roya's astonishment at her host's choice to perform a bhangra at a ball in the English countryside demonstrates the idea that Pakistani culture belongs in Pakistan. In contrast, with a special emphasis on education and imports being from abroad, Pakistan embraces the West. Roya further clarifies this belief by specifying that Avondon Hall was an additional basis for her incredulity. In Roya's view, the (fictional) Avondon Hall, a lavish estate formerly owned by Lady Avondon, is a quintessential specimen of British high society, and to perform bhangra dance in this unsuitable location exacerbates her dismay. Her consternation is especially significant given that, as the ball is a birthday celebration, bhangra dances are frequently performed in Pakistan for joyous occasions, like weddings or birthdays. By hoping that 'Gainsborough on the nearby wall couldn't hear', Roya is implying that bhangra is worthy of condescension. She is aghast at the thought of it and indicates that a pillar of high-brow western society should be disgraced to see such a dance performed in its presence. When bhangra dances, and other traditional Pakistani dances, are performed in the book while the characters are in Pakistan, there is no indication of inferiority or offense – only when performed internationally does there appear to be disdain. The perceived superiority of British customs and culture is evidenced throughout the short stories.

In 'Begum Saira Returns', some characters put-on a British accent because they believe that this will elevate them in society. This strengthens the argument that Pakistani society consider British characteristics to be vastly appealing as it will help them reach the social status they desire. Moreover, Islamabad housewives praise the popular tailor, Raiz, in 'The Autumn Ball' for his ability to 'replicate Western clothing' (Warnasuriya 120). The protagonist, Samina, in 'Only the Deepest Love' bitterly describes the postcard of her estranged father, and his young British wife, Rebecca, as a picture of 'sunny first-world happiness' (Rehman 140). Each one of these instances is preserved with the image of the unattainable. The accent and clothing are inauthentic and copies of their superior originals. Samina's bitterness stems more from the nature of her father's new life than its general existence. Her father's new wife met him when she left England 'to intern as a reporter and experience 'exotic' Pakistan' (Ibid). Her attitude towards Pakistan exhibits feelings of superiority promulgated by western visitors. When she marries Samina's father, the couple move to England where they enjoy 'sunny first-world happiness', a state which Samina herself cannot secure. The comparative dominance of 'first-world' England and 'exotic' Pakistan demonstrates the social tension between the two cultures and establishes a subcontinent narrative which depicts the superiority of western culture above their own.

*Bride and Prejudice* also shows cultural difference as the foremost source of social tension through the uneasy courtship of the Indian Lalita Bakshi and American Will Darcy, the character of the Americanised Mr Kholi, and the seduction of Lalita's sister Lakhi by the young Englishman Johnny Wickham. Chadha does this by combining the British and South Asian culture. This can be seen most prominently within the character of Johnny Wickham, who immerses deep within Indian society, more so than Darcy, yet his relaxed British sexual mores nearly corrupt Lakhi. This subplot is the only feature within the film that significantly differs from Austen's novel. The de-escalation of the affair is required for a happy ending that ties in with Bollywood convention. However, arguably it avoids isolating Diaspora and Indian audiences in terms of culture and gender, and therefore, as Chadha has stated, 'show a multicultural blend in the film [...] on a global level and make it popular'. There are two further characters in the film that combine both cultures: Balraj (Bingley) and Kiran (Caroline Bingley) who are British citizens of South Asian ancestry. Balraj and Kiran are hugely wealthy, Oxford educated and, as Stephanie Jones points out, 'there is some sort of postcolonial challenge in the film's easy assumption of their sense of aristocratic nationality' (178). Consequently, this reading portrays reclaiming the throes of colonialism by firstly reducing it to one character of questionable morals and secondly, using it to celebrate migration and the success of multicultural upward mobility.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote about the British and French empires as being 'whatever is good or bad about places at home is shipped out and assigned comparable virtue and vice aboard' (79). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that after two hundred years of British rule, the 'virtues and vices' of English culture have disseminated its way throughout India and Pakistan. It is evident why women of the Jane Austen Society of Pakistan connect so directly to Austen – British culture incorporated into Pakistani culture through centuries of imperialism, which is preserved and displayed in Austen's novels. It also explains why, despite feminist strides, the short stories that appear in *Austenistan* end with the 'accession to stability' through the prospect of marriage for the heroines. The novel, as expressed by Said, projects a 'knowable community of Englishmen and women' which 'shaped the idea of England in such a way as to give identity, presence [and] ways of reusable articulation'. Novels, such as Austen's, not only reflect their culture, but are also instrumental factors in creating culture. By imbedding the society into writing, Austen's word transcend geographic and era specific boundaries to become 'reusable' – not only in literal reinterpretations, such as *Austenistan* and *Bride and Prejudice*, but also in daily life. Austen's plots, which convey an attainable quality of life, are conceivable and her characters and situations familiar. This has resulted in establishing modern connections in her work and, as one Jane

Austen of Society of Pakistan member pointed out, reading Austen's novels has helped Pakistani women to better understand and guide their own lives. It would be remiss not to mention, however, that while the cultural impact of imperialism is undeniable, the increasing influence of popular culture has helped create a preference for, and dominance of, western culture. The visible connections between Regency England and modern-day India and Pakistan are highlighted prominently throughout *Austenistan* and *Bride and Prejudice* in several ways. Partialities to the west, which began under imperial rule, are now perpetuated through travel, dancing and class. The two-hundred-year-old society, which Austen so pertinently depicted, has found such traction in present-day Indian and Pakistan.

Though Austen never travelled beyond southern England, she left a lasting impression throughout the world. Arguably, new adaptations can have the same lasting impact as Austen's works and are important cultural literature in their own right. It is often period dramas that are thought of when considering Austen and adaptations, but the most interesting adaptations do much more than a period realisation of Austen's stories. South Asian contemporary adaptations build upon the original texts and are a means of keeping Austen's much-loved narratives – and observations – current for modern audiences and future generations. Ultimately, the quality of Austen's storytelling, wry humour and ongoing relevance make her appealing to audiences, old and new. Jane Austen's adaptability lies predominately in her ability to write about issues that appealed to the public; issues such as class, family, courtship and marriage were themes that epitomised the middle-classes throughout Austen's time and it has proven to be a contributing factor to South Asian contemporary life. Austen is located at the centre of every most, if not all, South Asian homes through her focus on human relationships and situations, which are still significant in South Asia today.

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# Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Tracing Nur Jahan in Contemporary Historical Accounts and Fictions

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ANANYA BHARDWAJ

**Abstract:** The historical fictional novel with its mix of creativity, imagination, and facts, also comes with notions which have emerged from colonial and empirical sentiments. This paper aims to look at Indu Sunderesan's *The Twentieth Wife* and study the patterns of colonial prejudices which lie in works of historical fiction. This paper will also explore the impact of colonial trade on the cultural tropes of the 21st century. More importantly, the paper will trace the dismantling of the preconceived idea of the 'woman in the harem' through the figure of Jahangir's Twentieth Wife.

**Keywords:** Historical fiction, postcolonialism, colonial stereotypes, Mehrunnisa, Nur Jahan, women

## Introduction

The popular cultural representations of subjects from the Global South differ vastly in their portrayals by white writers and travellers. A glimpse at the travelogues of Portuguese, Dutch, or English writers would show the inherent stereotypical notions that the Global North held (still holds) of the Global South. Gabriel García Márquez, in his Nobel lecture,<sup>1</sup> elaborates on these models of realism which he, along with others in the world, had grown up reading. He questions its sustainability and truthfulness, he questions its one-sidedness, and its inflexibility. He says in his speech, delivered on 8th December 1982, 'I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. [...] Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.' His point of contention is that the reality of Latin America is very different from its contemporary North America, thus rendering it unbelievable to the colonisers. And if the everyday realities of these once-colonised lands are not believed, there is no way or no reason to try and represent it through the mainstream modes of representation since these modes developed in response to different kinds of realities.

The paper argues that most historical fictions of the subcontinent, despite being written by South Asians or diasporic writers, embed Reality for the purpose of serving it on a platter, so as not to challenge the beliefs of the colonisers. The 'exotic' lands are kept alive in these texts through descriptions of landscapes, food, garments, languages, and people. Moreover, there is a visible change in the selection of words used for narrating those fictitious incidents. For instance, words which are taken directly from local dialects or subcontinental languages are highlighted or italicised and are mostly accompanied by a footnote providing their explanations in English. On the other hand, when white writers write about habits like having supper, which are not a part of the daily routine of the people of the Global South, they seldom highlight it, or provide a note with its meaning. The readers across the globe are expected to find out about the practice or phenomenon by themselves. A plausible reason would be that the writers of the Global North believe *their* reality to be the Reality. The genre of Magical Realism, of which Márquez is considered to be the Father, emerged only to challenge *this* belief.

The paper would begin by discussing the category of ‘Third World Cosmopolitans’<sup>2</sup> so as to establish Sundaresan’s geographical and cultural position within the category of historical fiction writing emerging from South Asia. To corroborate the claim that her writing caters to a predominantly white audience, it would further take recourse to the accounts of travellers and courtiers who came to Mughal India and wrote about it in their memoirs as a way of comparison. Post this, the paper would discuss the progression of Mehrunissa till her becoming Nur Jahan, taking into consideration how different historians have described her and where Sundaresan falls amidst them. To make the picture holistic, it becomes imperative to highlight certain stereotypes for which ‘Third World Cosmopolitans’ fall since they target white readership. Conclusively, the paper would talk about postcolonialism and historical fiction; the ways in which they can coexist within the parameters of realism and historicism.

### Third World Cosmopolitans

‘The category of writers called ‘Third World Cosmopolitans’, who are globally visible, who are taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, and who are hailed in the review pages of Western journals as interpreters and authentic voices of the non-Western world hardly ever include a writer from India who does not write in English [...] the precondition for belonging to this club is that s/he must write originally in English. Implicit here is an erasure of the diversity of India.’ (Mukherjee, 2000)<sup>3</sup>

It is intriguing to note that many diasporic writers hailing from South Asia choose to write of South Asia in their new homelands. As Lisa Lau suggests, ‘[...] perhaps due to their familiarity with both culture and geographical location of their countries (and cities) of origin. It is possible that having settled outside South Asia, they may choose to write of South Asia in order to inform other non-South Asians about their culture.’<sup>4</sup> Writing of the homeland can also be cathartic, because the process of writing takes one back to the place they have left behind, the stories they grew up with, and the people they were about. *The Twentieth Wife*,<sup>5</sup> by the Indian-American writer Indu Sundaresan, is one such text about one of the most phenomenal, powerful, but not-so famous queens who ruled the subcontinent from behind her veil. The main focus of this paper would be to trace her presence in popular imaginations of today and further challenge the notions of white supremacy through the tales of prowess of Empress Nur Jahan in history and literature.

### Foreigners’ Narratives of Jahangir’s Hindustan

The presence of the Jesuits has predated that of the English or the Dutch, and they became especially important and influential during the reign of Jahangir.<sup>6</sup> ‘The Jesuits had been in India for a long time. Now there were other firangis also. The world was indeed opening up. The newcomers styled themselves ‘ambassadors’ from a tiny island in Europe called England.’ (316) Sundaresan talks about the presence of merchants, traders, and diplomats in her novel very elaborately. The aim is to highlight how nobles in the Indian subcontinent viewed merchants as the lowly-kind, not suitable to be present before the Emperor. This is undoubtedly because of the lack of noble birth and a stable occupation, their nomadic tendencies, and unawareness of court etiquette. ‘What were the English after all but a country of fishermen and shepherds? [...] The foreigners wanted the spices, calico and saltpetre that India had in abundance. If so, they should have taken the trouble to approach the Emperor with an appropriate ambassador.’ (316–317) Mehrunissa’s musings in the novel are heard through these lines by Sundaresan. Along with an indication that she was politically very aware and concerned, these lines also highlight the importance and stature of the Mughal Empire in the eyes of its subjects.

Nur Jahan, being one of the highly invested and knowledgeable subjects of this empire, has been labelled as scheming and cunning by many, but Sundaresan paints her as a woman of the world, a woman who did not want to spend an anonymous life within the walls of the imperial



harem. Findly, in his book titled *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India*,<sup>7</sup> writes, 'The stories preserved of this period, however, portrayed a Mihrunnisa full of schemes and hardened dealings.' (34) As consumers of such narratives, what has to be kept in mind is that it is through the eyes of these merchants and fishermen that some of the most popular representations of the subcontinent have been documented in the books of the world. Mehrunnisa wasn't like the Virgin Mary or like Elizabeth I; she was a widow with a child, had an ambition with the understanding of politics and administration, wanting to marry the Emperor of one of the largest empires in the world. The descriptions of her would be clouded when viewed from the eyes of men who have hailed certain images of womanhood as ideal and divine.

### From Mehrunnisa to Nur Jahan

'Day by day her influence and dignity increased [...] No grant of lands was conferred upon any woman except under her seal. [...] Sometimes she would sit in the balcony of her palace, while the nobles would present themselves, and listen to her dictates. Coin was struck in her name [...] (and) on all farmans also receiving the Imperial signature, the name of "Nur Jahan, the Queen Begam," was jointly attached. (Until) at last her authority reached such a pass that the King was such only in name.'

– *Ikbal-nama-i Jahangiri*, translated and edited by H. M. Elliott and John Dowson<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note how the entire novel, since the time Mehrunnisa saw Salim for the first time at the age of eight, revolves around her heart's deep rooted desire to marry him one day. She is shown to be an intelligent girl, a quick learner, and a determined student, but it all comes down to her usage of this intelligence in finding ways to be seen and appreciated by Salim. This can also be seen as an inversion of courtly love, given that the agency to desire rests with the woman, where Mehrunnisa pines for an object beyond her reach. But at the same time, we cannot forget that this agency rests with her because she belongs to a class which isn't noble. Does this mean that women born in lower classes had more agency than women with higher ancestries? In some nuanced cases, they did. This is because the higher the class, the more confined a woman becomes through restrictions in mobility and regular decision-making. Since marital alliances were based on political alliances, for them to be fruitful, the woman had to be 'pure'. This manner of confinement is not quite visible across women of lower classes because of lack of means to confine them and also lack of political motivation and social obligation. Such trends of portraying female characters as the subject instead of the object of desire, especially from the 19th century onwards, have been common across the globe — in the novels of Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, Barbara Pym, Leo Tolstoy, or Attia Hosain. But does this subjectivity come despite class, race, and in the Indian subcontinent, caste barriers?

At the tender age of eight, Mehrunnisa exclaims that she finds Salim to be 'beautiful'. But Beni Prasad, in *History of Jahangir*,<sup>9</sup> writes, 'She aspired to the conquest of Prince Salim and succeeded, by a dextrous use of her charms and accomplishments at an entertainment, in casting a spell over him.' The association of women with witchcraft in luring men has been universal, especially in works of male writers and historians. On the other hand, Ruby Lal, in her feminist history of Nur Jahan,<sup>10</sup> gives her a different dimension altogether and with it, a novel reason for the readers to imagine why Jahangir would have found her extraordinary. She writes, 'In that turbulent land, she'd witnessed the troubles that arose when the capital and the province knocked against each other, when an emperor and his son collided, when ambition, ego, and factionalism tangled. She seemed more canny than other royal women her age about the workings of the empire, exhibiting the knowledge expected of esteemed elder women like her harem mentors.' (110)

Alternatively, this can be read as the writer's aim to depict women of vision as wanting male stalwarts to rely on for the purpose of being powerful. Mehrunnisa has been portrayed as a very self-aware and self-reflexive character, knowing very well that in the world of men, power had to be extracted from them. Sundaresan talks at length about Mehrunnisa's fascination with Ruqayya

Sultan Begum, Akbar's chief wife, who was the most powerful woman in the harem. Her power came with her title, *Padshah Begum*,<sup>11</sup> and this title became hers only after her marriage to the Emperor and her success at making herself indispensable to him; (in Ruqayya's case) not sexually, but intellectually and emotionally.

Sundaresan also gives in to the prevalent stereotypes while describing her male characters. Her description of Salim's first glimpse of Mehrunnisa aides the pre-conceived notions that the Global North has of the Islamic World. 'Ya Allah! Was he in Paradise? Words from the Holy Book came unbidden to his mind: "The believers shall find themselves reclining upon couches lined with brocade, the fruits of the garden nigh to gather; and will find therein maidens restraining their glances, untouched before them by any man or Jinn, lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral." She was all that and more. He stared at her, his gaze riveted, everything else fading around her.' (81) The Mehrunnisa of Sundaresan's historical fiction is a woman of immaculate beauty and charm, and it is this charm which helps her woo Salim, even after years and years go by. A lot of historians claim that Mehrunnisa was a woman of intelligence and wit, she was well versed with the political scenario of the world, good with calculations, and with running the Empire. It has been mentioned even by Sundaresan as to how her fearlessness was attractive to Jahangir, 'He admired her fierce independence, her deep sense of self, her convictions about her actions. She scorned the rules, trod on them.' (352-353), but in order to cater to the cyclic progression of the trope of a love story, this union has been credited primarily to her unconventional beauty which is unmatched. Mehrunnisa, the name meaning Sun Among Women, has been highlighted and reiterated multiple times in the novel, only to bring back attention to her features, her 'slender back' even after being a mother, her breasts, and her body. Moreover, such associations in the novel have been made with other women as well; for instance, Arjumand (Khurram's wife who would later be the famous Mumtaz Mahal), Jagat Gosini (Jahangir's supreme wife before his marriage to Mehrunnisa), and also Anarkali, Akbar's concubine whom Salim allegedly falls in love with.

An alternative way to look at the constant reiteration of the meaning of her name, Sun Among Women, would be to say that she is the Man Among Women. The Sun stands for masculinity, in opposition to the Moon, which stands for femininity. The entire novel, and even this mystery behind this figure of a woman who ruled one of the largest empires of the world, is one that derives its foundation from her un-femininity. Wit, intelligence, knowledge, and diplomacy are unwomanly traits. They make a person aware and accustomed to surviving in the world of monetisation and trade. Nur Jahan, being well versed with all of these and more, then becomes not only Sun Among Women, but quite literally, the Man Among all Women. Is Sundaresan then trying to project her desirability as being a result of the masculine in her?

This paper argues that even though Mehrunnisa has been depicted in masculine terms, moving away from the docility of the feminine, the author doesn't take this to the realm of the physical. 'Driven to a frenzy by his one glimpse of Mehrunnisa, Salim groped and grabbed at the girls, thinking one, then the other, to be the angel of the morning.' (84) The conscious description and language used to picture Salim after his meeting with Mehrunnisa, is the language of the Coloniser. The frenzy to explore uncharted territory brought the Europeans to South Asia (and other places), similarly, the frenzy in Salim led him to grope and grab at other girls, finally making his way to Mehrunnisa after years of exploration, and at the end, designating her his Twentieth Wife; *Nur Jahan*, Light of the World.

### Manufactured Stereotypes

Despite the novel having been written by a woman of South Asian descent, there is an inherent bias in the body of the text against the visible, everyday realities of South Asia. This is not to say that the text openly criticises or mocks the subcontinent, but it definitely doesn't challenge much of these stereotypes. The novel is about 17th century India, a time of the flourish of an Indo-

Islamic Empire which brought the Europeans rushing to it because of their greed. There were stories, stereotypes, taboos, etc. about this foreign land, and certain descriptions, even in the 21st century texts, do not give way to initiate change. One of the recent examples of such stereotypes being made to come to the surface through art is the movie *Padmavat*<sup>12</sup> directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. There is a clear distinguishable difference in the ways in which the Rajput King, Maharawal Ratan Singh, is depicted, with his palace full of light and beauty, in contrast to Alauddin Khilji, with his palace and self always submerged in darkness. This raises further questions about our associations of skin colours with the colour white and black, and how we still associate peace and tranquility with white, while death and sadness with black. Sundaresan also resorts to these stereotypes in the usage of language and descriptions, especially of folk tales, Muslim men, and the imperial harem.

The following sentences describe Mehrunnisa's first encounter with the head eunuch Hoshiyar Khan: 'Mehrunnisa watched her mother leave, wanting to beg her to stay. How could she leave her alone here with a funny looking man? [...] she was all alone with this strange, pasty-faced, limp-moustached creature. Who was he? And why did he have so much power here, in the harem of women?' (32–33) Contemporary feminist criticisms would label this as transphobic and also allege the author of assuming someone's pronouns. But even if one looks specifically at the text after placing it in context, one realises that eunuchs were very prominent in the Mughal court and harem. Mehrunnisa might not have thought them to be 'funny looking' for she must have been accustomed to seeing them frequently. Homosexuality and trans-identities have been very common in the Indian subcontinent, as Madhavi Menon argues in her book, *Infinite Variety* (2018).<sup>13</sup>

The novel also talks about Mehrunnisa's parents' marriage at length; about how Ghias Beg, who even though could marry four times, did not marry anyone after Asmat Begum because he did not feel the need to. There is a sense of portrayal of Muslim men in a lustful light, wherein the writer seems to be succumbing to the popular beliefs regarding Muslim men marrying multiple times and 'owning' all their wives within their harems. While describing Mehrunnisa's relationship with her first husband, Ali Quli, Sundaresan writes, 'He did not beat her, was not openly cruel to her like other women's husbands were, as if their wives were dogs, unclean, untouchable, fit only for the most carnal satisfaction.' (109) This is the way the Coloniser has always viewed the Global South and justified colonisation; in this book, similar language of colonisation has been used to portray the women of South Asia in the centuries of Mughal rule. Similar references can also be found in texts written in Britain in the aftermath of mass colonisation like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*<sup>14</sup> where Jane explicitly mentions how she doesn't wish to be one of those Arab women in their men's harems. These claims were made on the foundations of a belief that white women were more 'emancipated' than women of colour because they were more educated, civilised, and had been 'granted' more freedom by their fathers or husbands. Moreover, such representations of womanhood do not only corroborate the discourse of orientalism, but also the contemporary Hindutva politics. The act of making the practice of *Triple Talaq*<sup>15</sup> illegal and not passing any such acts for the protection of women of other religions, or the recent controversy over *Love Jihad*,<sup>16</sup> are ways to highlight the victimisation of women at the hands of 'vile' and 'lustful' Muslim men.

Nur Jahan breaks these myths by being the pillar behind the functioning of the court and the empire. Ira Mukhoty, in *Daughters of the Sun*,<sup>17</sup> notes, 'Noor Jahan is issuing royal farmans signed with her own seal, having gold coins struck in her name, engaging in trade and has a series of magnificent buildings constructed through the breadth of the empire.' (137–138) Even the English Ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe,<sup>18</sup> talks grandly about Nur Jahan and her escapades. He documents his frenzy at coming across this wondrous woman who owned jagirs, ships, collected revenue, and issued legal notices. He also mentions his tireless efforts at finding appropriate gifts for this powerful Queen! This is not to say that such agency was visible in women across classes, religions, and castes, but the belief that the idea of independent women was fictional in the subcontinent is not entirely true. This argument subverts the one earlier made regarding women's mobility which gets threatened by belonging to a higher class. The question that arises then is — in what context

are women truly agential? It needs to be noted that the means to have agency, in the world of men, comes with association to them. In the case of Mehrunissa, given that her father was a commoner, she had the means to desire and be mobile. In that of Nur Jahan, because her husband was the Emperor of Hindustan, she had the means to rule. Another significant example of such associations would be Gulbadan Begum, Humayun's aunt, who wrote his biography, the *Humayunama*.

Other descriptions of the East, where Sundaresan gives in to the stereotypical ideas of the East being a land of exotic animals and peoples, are very prevalent in the novel. She talks about cows and their rhythmic chewing, making it appear unworldly. She also talks about fairs, specifically the famous Meena Bazaar, where the royal ladies gathered to shop, exchange gossip, and flirt. There are elaborate descriptions of snake charmers, monkeys, and other animals used for the recreation of humans. She writes, 'As the music played, the monkey, clad in a blue waistcoat, a tasselled fez on its head, jumped up and down.' (17) These descriptions cater to an audience who are not of South Asia, because similar to how this paper argued that Mehrunnisa would have been aware of the presence of eunuchs, likewise, for South Asians, these are a part of their everyday realities and do not need to be unnaturalised or romanticised.

### More Mouths, More Tales

For the colonisers, the colonies are exotic, because as stated earlier in the paper through the words of Márquez, they view Reality as singular. It is exciting for them to dig out tales and conspiracies from these lands full of intrigues, controversies, magic, and supernatural phenomena. Sundaresan, in her novel, mentions the episode of Mehrunnisa's first husband's (Ali Quli) assassination as a provocation by Ali Quli himself. It is impossible to know what actually conspired but contemporary historical accounts do not view the incident as a plot by Jahangir or Mehrunnisa to eliminate him from their way of getting married. This charge that Jahangir plotted his murder, which has become a tell-tale now, was first laid on him in the works of the European writer, Niccolao Manucci (ca. 1656), who noted, 'The king, who was deeply in love with her, sent an order to the governor of the city of Patana (Patnah) that as soon as Sher Afghan should arrive there with a letter, he must be slain. This was done, but the valorous soldier, although taken unawares, killed five persons in defending himself. Sher Afghan<sup>19</sup> being dead, Jahangir took the woman into his palace.'<sup>20</sup> Other sources, like those of Alexander Dow,<sup>21</sup> claim that Jahangir sent assassins to the house of Ali Quli to kill him in his sleep. But because this was unsuccessful, Jahangir had to send Qutbuddin to make sure that the task was successful. In abiding by the Emperor's wish which led to a truce, both the men ultimately killed each other.

Multiple accounts of travellers and courtiers exist, with different versions of the incident, one of them even calling Sher Afghan, the 'Persian Romeo'.<sup>22</sup> These associations to popular characters known all over Europe are ways in which the unfamiliar is made familiar and is co-opted into the mainstream discourse. But what this co-option does is take away the creative imagination from the colonised populace to render their unique realities believable without an aid from the Coloniser.

### Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel

Many nuanced definitions have surfaced since Johnson's but the most obvious answer to the question of defining the genre of historical fiction is 'fiction set in the past'.<sup>23</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, in his essay, 'Representation and the Postcolonial Text',<sup>24</sup> declared 'historicism and realism' to be 'necessary fictions that tragically believed too much in their necessity and too little in their own fictionality,' and blamed imperial discourses like realism, to supposedly—'deny their own material and historical construction.' It is imperative to consume historically motivated art as fiction and not as mirrors of gone reality because every art is produced in a landscape and time-space which includes the materiality of the producer. But does this mean that postcolonialism should always be in a conundrum with historicism and realism?

‘The problem with such readings is that they ignore the ethical commitments to historical plausibility routinely expressed by many postcolonial novelists. For example, even Rushdie himself asserts his desire that his novels be read as thoughtful, informed analyses of the actual past and not simply as acts of discursive contestation or linguistic experimentation.’<sup>25</sup>

While one needs to be aware of the problems which come with the postmodern era of multiplicity of truths, with fictionalising history, and considering the context from which the subject produces it, it cannot plainly be considered to be a figment of the creator’s imagination. Postcolonial novelists use the trope of historical fiction to keep the memory of the violence of colonisation alive and to say that these texts cannot be seen as plausible appendixes to reality would be taking away agency and a means of expression from the oppressed communities. It isn’t bizarre to hear staunch nationalists claiming that the Holocaust never happened, or colonial conquests weren’t as violent as narratives from the colonies portray it. Therefore, it is in the light of this understanding, and the realisation of a responsibility, that historical novels from the subcontinent should be critiqued by the subcontinent.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Márquez, Gabriel García – Nobel Lecture. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Sat. 7 Nov 2020. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1982/marquez/lecture/>

<sup>2</sup> The term, though highly problematic, has only been used here to highlight an academic category and not as a significance of one’s belonging to a place/culture.

<sup>3</sup> Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 2000. *The Perishable Empire. Essays on Indian Writing in English* New Delhi: Oxford UP.

<sup>4</sup> Lau, Lisa. “Making the Difference: The Differing Presentations and Representations of South Asia in the Contemporary Fiction of Home and Diasporic South Asian Women Writers.” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2005, pp. 237–256. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3876512](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876512).

<sup>5</sup> Sundaresan, Indu. *The Twentieth Wife*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Ross, E. Denison and Eileen Power (eds.) *Jahangir and the Jesuits: With an Account of the Travels of Benedict Goes and the Mission to Pegu* New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., 1930.

<sup>7</sup> Findly, Ellison Banks *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Elliot, H. M., and John Dodson, trans. and ed. *The History of India as told by its Own Historians. The Muhammadan Period*. Vols. 5, 6, 7. London: Trübner and Co., 1873, 1875, 1877. Reprint. New York: AMS Press, Inc. 1966.

<sup>9</sup> L. D. B. “History of Jahangir by Beni Prasad. With Foreword by Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Litt.D. (Allahabad University Studies in History, Vol. I.) 8vo, Pp. Xviii li 501, 2 Plates. Oxford University Press; Madras Printed, 1922.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1923, pp. 173–175., doi:10.1017/S0041977X00000161.

<sup>10</sup> Lal, Ruby *Empress: The Astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> First Lady of the Mughal Empire

<sup>12</sup> *Padmavat*. Directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Bhansali Productions, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Menon, Madhavi. *Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India* Speaking Tiger, 2018

<sup>14</sup> Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010. Print.

<sup>15</sup> The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 was passed on 26 July 2019 making instant triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) in any form – spoken, written, or by electronic means such as email or SMS – illegal and void, with up to three years in jail for the husband.

<sup>16</sup> The conspiracy theory purports that Muslim men target Hindu women for conversion to Islam by means such as seduction, feigning love, deception, kidnapping, and marriage, as part of a broader “war” by Muslims against India



- <sup>17</sup> Mukhorthy, Ira *Daughters of the Sun: Empresses, Queens and Begums of the Mughal Empire* New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2015.
- <sup>18</sup> Foster, William ed. *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619, As Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence*. 2 vols. London: Haklyut Society, 1899.
- <sup>19</sup> A title given to Ali Quli by Jahangir after he killed a tigress and saved the Emperor's life.
- <sup>20</sup> Irvine, William (tr.) *Storia Do Mogol or Mogul India 1653-1708 by Niccolao Manucci Venetian*, 4 vols. London: Murray, 1907.
- <sup>21</sup> Dow, Alexander. *The History of Hindostan*. Vol. 3, *From the Death of Akbar to the Settlement of the Empire Under Aurunzebe*. London: S. Beckert & P. A De Hondt, 1770. Reprint. New Delhi: Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 1973.
- <sup>22</sup> Findly, Ellison Banks *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- <sup>23</sup> Johnson, Sarah L. (2002). 'Defining the genre: What are the rules for historical fiction'. Speech at the annual meeting of the Association of Writing Programs, March.
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- <sup>25</sup> Dalley, Hamish. "Postcolonialism and the Historical Novel: Epistemologies of Contemporary Realism." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 51-67., doi:10.1017/pli.2013.3.

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# An Ontology of Permeability: Tracing Radical Nonduality in the Poetry of Nabina Das

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BASUDHARA ROY

**Abstract:** The philosophical idea of nonduality proposes an understanding of being as permeable, relational and interdependent. Radical nonduality within ecofeminism seeks to emphasize the essential and holistic ontological connections between women and ecology by bringing to the fore the ways of consciousness, experience and identity that inalienably link the socio-cultural place of women in societies worldwide with the politics of environmental knowledge and representation. In the oeuvre of Nabina Das, an established voice in contemporary Indian English poetry, one comes across a potent poetic articulation of such ecological nonduality along with a transgressive feminist criticism of masculine models of development and globalization. Hailing from Guwahati, Assam, Das writes with a strong regional inflection. The colours, myths, songs, politics and sufferings of her native land constitute a significant subtext in her work even as its cosmopolitan overtones carry the reader into geographies and worldviews beyond. The proposed paper, placing Das's poetry under an ecofeminist lens, shall attempt to explore how the subjectivity of her Anima poems offers an unitive and unbroken view of women and ecology.

**Keywords:** Ontology, feminism, ecology, human, nonhuman, interconnectedness

From a notebook, March 7, 1974:

The poet today must be twice-born. She must have begun as a poet, she must have understood the suffering of the world as political, and have gone through politics, and on the other side of politics she must be reborn again as a poet.

But today I would rephrase this: it's not a matter of dying as a poet into politics, or of having to be reborn as a poet "on the other side of politics" (where is that?), but of something else – finding the relationship. (Rich, 21)

The relationship between poetry and politics ever connotes poignancy. To make poetry a potent political tool without impoverishing its strength, force and value as poetry is a daunting poetic accomplishment for one realizes that where politics finds a home, poetry may, in all probability, be extinguished. To confront politics with poetry requires a human commitment of the highest order. As Czeslaw Milosz writes in his Introduction to his *Collected Poems*, "to remain aware of the weight of fact without yielding to the temptation to become only a reporter is one of the most difficult puzzles confronting a practitioner of poetry." (xxiii) The poet aspiring to make a statement that is both significantly political and poetically memorable, must ceaselessly and wholeheartedly confront the world as it is and from these multiple interactions, achieve a distillation in thought and expression that mirrors the sufferings of the objective world through its acute internalization by the crucial subjective self. This is easier said than done and every poet who desires to speak to the world's agony must negotiate this relationship in distinct and unique ways to arrive at one's own poetic voice and signature.

In the oeuvre of Nabina Das, an established voice in contemporary Indian English poetry, one comes across an admirable case of poetry as politics. Even a cursory acquaintance with her poetry is enough to bring home to the reader her overt and intense engagement with political questions.

Yet, no reader of Das's poetry can decry her poetry as sheer propaganda. On the other hand, Das accomplishes only what some of the most mature poetic selves can – an ardent identification of the poetic personal with the public political. Self, world, personal, public, poetry and politics permeate the many-tongued and polyvalent texts that Das creates. Hailing from Guwahati, Assam, Nabina Das with a Masters in Linguistics from JNU, Delhi and an MFA in Poetry from Rutgers University (Camden, NJ), has lived and worked as a journalist for almost a decade in the US before settling down at Hyderabad. A Charles Wallace, Sangam House and Commonwealth Writers writing fellowship winner, a novelist, columnist, short fiction writer, creative writing instructor and trained classical singer, she is most profoundly a poet with three full-length poetry collections under her belt – *Blue Vessel* (Zaporogue, Denmark, 2012), *Into the Migrant City* (Writers Workshop, Kolkata, 2013) and *Sanskarnama* (Red River, New Delhi, 2017). "Our postcolonial history and political challenges prompt me to keep poetry in my arsenal," states Das in her interview for *Centre for Stories*. She states:

The personal was truly political for us even when I was too young to realize it. Where I come from, poetry is no pastime, although no one pays a poet for what she gives to the world. The sort of political and social climate I have grown up witnessing in Assam, my home state, can only be directly addressed by means of poetry and art. Patriarchy, caste segregation, class wars, and environmental plunder — I'd imagine a few reasons such as these ones are enough to steel a poet's pen. Hence I write. (Das, *Centre for Stories*)

Among the many thematic preoccupations that Das's poetry evinces – "identity, women, bodies, memory as a tool to reinvent stories and spaces of protest and resistance" (Das, *The Northeast Today*) eco-consciousness constitutes an important motif. Das's politics, as any reader will quickly realize, is leftist, feminist and ecological. Brave and defiant, her voice takes on the State and its patriarchal fundamentalist, separatist and capitalist manoeuvres in almost every poem, speaking for the necessity of upholding diversity and individual liberty. This paper intends to examine her political ideas within the wider philosophical framework of a radical nondualist ecological consciousness.

The term 'ecocriticism', first coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" where he described it as articulating the symbiotic relationship between ecology and literature, has diversified today to become a blanket term that involves a multiplicity of approaches such as nature writing, deep ecology, ecofeminism, the revaluation of place, environmental ethics, animal rights, bioregionalism, social ecology, political ecology, ecopsychology, ecophilosophy, etc. Theodore Roszak in his book, *The Voice of the Earth*, writes:

These days we see the prefix "eco" affixed to many words. Ecopolitics, ecophilosophy, ecofeminism, ecoconsumerism, even ecoterrorism . . . . The result is not always graceful, but the gesture is nonetheless significant as a sign of the times. This tiny neologistic flag flies above our language like a storm-warning meant to signal our belated concern for the fate of the planet. Its often awkward connection with words from many sources—politics, economics, the arts—reveals our growing realization of how many aspects of our life that concern will have to embrace. (14)

The range of words in which the prefix 'eco' is used these days is, indeed, staggering. Within this wide discourse of ecocritical thinking, the questioning of ontology or the nature of being has been a cornerstone, each ontological inquiry shaping its distinct human response to the ecological project. The anthropocentric or shallow ecological approach, for example, while acknowledging nature's bounty as instrumental to human survival on the planet, still posits nature as human's constant 'other', thus legitimizing human control over the natural world. The deep ecological approach on the other hand, also referred to as the biocentric or earth-centric view on nature, finds the universe as one holistic unit shared by a large number of species including homo sapiens.

Ecofeminism attempts to locate women as legitimate speakers on nature's behalf but even within the discipline, ontological debates as to what makes for women's kinship with nature, strongly reverberate. It has been, for instance, tempting in many quarters to assume that women

evinced or should naturally evince ecological concerns because they are biologically linked to nature, her cyclical changes and her ability to reproduce, nourish and nurture. Overshadowing such popular/consumerist versions of ecofeminist thought are also narratives of what Catriona Sandilands describes as “motherhood environmentalism” which boils down women’s concern over nature “to an obvious manifestation of natural protective instincts toward home and family.” (xiii) Such a viewpoint, in her opinion, makes a return to patriarchal and heterosexual ‘family’ values and has “nothing to do with commitment to abstract principles like self-determination or democracy or liberty or inherent value or equality or even (bizarrely) ecology.” (xiii) Thinkers like Sandilands, Barbara Epstein, Joni Seager, Karen Warren etc. argue that ecofeminism should endeavour to problematize gender through ecological questions rather than aligning itself to sexist ideas. As Sandilands writes:

Not only is nature an important moment in feminist discourse, but gender is an important element in the social and political creation of nature. To understand the ways in which nature and gender are wielded as discursive constructs, to investigate the ways in which the oppression of women and the domination of nature are imbricated in a whole host of destructive relations and practices, and to create an oppositional framework capable of addressing their interrelations, it seems vital to explore the connections that ecofeminists examine between women/feminism and nature/ecology. (xvi)

Bioregionalism proposes that human identity should be understood as “constituted by our residence in a larger community of natural beings—our local bioregion—rather than, or at least supplementary to, national, state, ethnic, or other more common bases of identity.” (Lynch et al, 4) Bioregional thought attempts to foster human communities that live sustainably in place by understanding its unique bioregional character. Warwick Fox’s concept of transpersonal ecology looks upon human beings as one among innumerable species ontologically embedded in a complex ecological network. Ecopsychology is a term introduced by Theodore Roszak’s *The Voice of the Earth* where he describes its goal as bridging “our culture’s long-standing, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum.” (14) In *Where Species Meet*, Donna Haraway argues for the consideration of the diverse forms of life as ‘companion species’ and their complex entanglement in an inalienable web of being:

My point is simple: Once again we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories. Appreciation of the complexity is, of course, invited. But more is required too. Figuring what that more might be is the work of situated companion species. It is a question of cosmopolitics, of learning to be “polite” in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing. (42)

It is from among these diverse approaches to ecocritical thought that I attempt to draw my understanding of an ontology of permeability which looks upon being as planetary, connected, permeable, unitive and bound across life-forms. An ontology of permeability assumes a radical nonduality of being between the human and the non-human world, of nature as self and vice-versa. It is, as Deborah Winters argues, an experiential rather than informational shift leading to the realization that “the ecological self is an expanded, more gracious, more spacious sense of self.” (264) Charlene Spretnak makes strong claims for the idea of radical nonduality by offering various examples of experiential, non-linguistic knowledges connecting humans with nature. She points out to the “body parables” of women – menstrual, sexual, gestational, reproductive, lactatory etc that offer women “a dreamy sense of soft boundaries” linking them to their wider world (430); the epistemological ideas of the indigenous people linking the earth to the cosmos; the intuitive magical world of children drawing them towards trees or animals; Eastern and Western practices of meditation that link the individual with the cosmos; perceptions of oneness with nature during extreme grief or profound silence, etc.

In much of Nabina Das's poetry, readers are apt to encounter a nondual approach to the world as human and nonhuman categories freely mix to offer both evidence and critique of life in our times. For the ecofeminist that Das undeniably is, nonduality is an essential component of her political project. Sandilands argues that ecological degradation being a complex social problem, ecofeminism's task should be, "to question if not transcend the fundamentally misleading nature/culture split, to show that division as arbitrary, to come to new realizations of humans as always already simultaneously natural and cultural beings, and to work in the world aware of our limitations." (70) Nabina Das while rejecting essentialist notions of women's identity, employs a keen feminist critique of patriarchal cultural practices, intimately linking the politics of environmental exploitation with the exploitation of marginal social groups in the country:

those fireflies and rivers  
 wanted to get to the roads  
 over the banks of refugee shacks  
 over tumbling tempo hoods  
 over our embarrassed long and rounded vowels  
 just to smell the tar of *dawki* roads  
  
 and walk walk walk those monsoon-muddied paths  
 that brought us at the teetering end to ask:  
  
 will the fish wake up and recognise us? (Das, *Kindle Magazine*)

In these lines, one arrives at an instant identification of fireflies, rivers and fish with the human dispossessed – refugees, tempo drivers and linguistic minorities. The idea of being is thoroughly porous, permeable as diversity freely travels in and through the poem's consciousness. The North-East makes its presence felt here with that single word 'dawki', further accentuating the poem's biotic and economic landscape. Nature, as the poets suggests here, is not alone in her victimization. Her victimization by humans is also a human loss in its erasure of an indigenous way of life:

truths and half lies  
 of bodies pushed under  
 of sad brides sleeping under waves  
 of fingers and rings carved on bed-mud  
 of money stash swaying like algae  
 of keys to homes that stood on one legs before falling asunder  
 of map etchings thrown to the fish's mouths  
 of words turned into sludge  
 of gods who wouldn't be worshipped in households (Das, *Kindle Magazine*)

The interconnectedness of firefly, fish and man that the old way of life preserved, has now entirely been lost and with that has been lost an entire body of historical and cultural knowledge of an ethnic group. The "railway lines" and "coffee cups" in the final lines of the poem are the metaphors of some skewed logic of modernization that built itself through the erasure of a complete indigenous episteme. This lost episteme that the poem documents, is as much an episteme of humans as of nature. The loss of one is the bereavement of the other.

Epistemic plundering is also the subject of 'Erasure', a poem that speaks of the relentless "damage/ in the name of corrections. A swipe/ to unthinkingness." (Das, *Sanskarnama*)

A little green a little torn.  
 I'm talking of books and histories  
 Our heads full of winter's tales.  
 I'm talking of children's faces  
 That have forgotten our justice songs.  
  
 Take the darkest ink and blot the days

Take a pinch of our existence and see  
how erasure becomes a norm. (Das, *Sanskarnama*)

Given the ongoing agenda of the current political regime in India to ‘nativize’ or saffronize history through an arduous and questionable process of making it Hindu-centric by radical rewriting of epochs and events, ‘Erasure’ speaks of how identities are being written off through rewriting on a grand scale. It is noteworthy to see how Das deftly works nouns like ‘green’ and ‘winter’ into the poem’s fabric to project a unified consciousness of the historically dispossessed assimilating ecological dispossession. In ‘Hills Are Now Coming Down On Us’, one again comes across an intense identification of ecological wastelands with human degradation:

Every time a tree comes down on our ego’s court  
Every time a face soaks up the miseries of the lit TV screen  
Our gods are hapless too, lined outside the ATMs  
Their earth hands of Abhaya outstretched for alms  
I’m turning into mulch in this sad soil, in this apathy  
My bones plastic brittle engulfing the sights and sounds (Das, *Sanskarnama*)

Here, trees, gods and humans are equally the victims of capitalization. The image of bones brittle as plastic poignantly conjures an image of a landscape glutted with plastic refuse. This sterile, apathetic landscape bereft of trees is bereft of faith too. ‘River-Sorrow’ and ‘Namami’, also from Das’s overtly political third collection *Sanskarnama*, evocatively bring out the degradation of our rivers and the immense human suffering that such degradation symbolizes. ‘River-Sorrow’ describes how the narrative of economic development has changed the lives of rivers as of people settled on their banks forever:

the washerwomen who came to the ghats  
are now pariahs  
the fish doesn’t toe-bite us anymore  
in the half-note of that untouchable boy  
who played his flute buffalo-borne  
the rivers are turning into splinters  
wood flakes sharper in the subcutaneous layer  
but we don’t wince (Das, *Sanskarnama*)

Both fish and washerwomen have become the victims of the patriarchal development narrative, their survival threatened into extinction by mindless self-serving capitalism. The rivers themselves have dwindled into splinters, incapable of sustaining human greed. In former ages, rivers have been symbols of life, nurture, fertility and prosperity. They have played hosts to the world’s greatest civilizations, nourished our lands, cultures and imaginations. In them has always been our first and last resort. Not any more, as Das notes in ‘Namami’:

the flood still rages forward carrying plastic bags, discarded  
condoms, the surf of human excreta, dead cattle, and the elixir  
of waste dripping from our human errors  
one drop by one drop by one (Das, *Sanskarnama*)

On the river surface is a reflection not only of pollution but of our degraded state of civilization. The poem bases itself, as the poet mentions in a footnote, on Namami Brahmaputra, “a scheme launched in Assam apparently in reverence of the river Brahma-putra and to create flood awareness. It involved huge expense of taxpayers’ money, fanfare and worship by priests. Later the state was deluged by one of the worst floods in recent memory.” (Das, *Sanskarnama*) Sociologist Mitul Baruah notes how the five-day long river festival dedicated to the Brahmaputra has been part of

a larger politics in Assam to “hinduize the state’s diverse socio-cultural practices.” The Brahmaputra though central to Assam’s economy and ecosystem, has never had a history of being deified or worshipped. “The Sanskrit word “Namami,” writes Baruah, “translates as ‘I worship thee’. Thus, an attempt has been made for the first time to sacralize the Brahmaputra (like the Ganges and the Yamuna in the Hindu heartland), and enroll it into the *Hindu(tva)* imagination.” (Baruah, *Undisciplined Environments*) Though Das’s poem lays emphasis on the flood that followed the festival, the epistemic reconstruction of the Brahmaputra’s legacy constitutes a potent subtext in the poem.

However, the ecofeminist nonduality in Nabina Das’s poetry is nowhere as pronounced as in her Anima poems. Though Das’s Anima poems are yet to make their formal appearance as a collection, (forthcoming with Yoda Press in 2022), they surface frequently enough in her published oeuvre to demand special attention. Her poems like ‘Anima Dreams a Home’, ‘Anima wakes up Tejimola’, ‘Anima Paints in Three Colours’, ‘Anima Takes Back the Night’, ‘Anima Sings to Earth and Death’ and ‘Anima counts some footprints one by one’ are merely a handful of Das’s many published pieces that articulate themselves through the consciousness of a narrator whom Das chooses to call Anima. “Metaphorically,” the poet writes, “Anima poems are feminist writing in the voice of a persona commenting on the world.” (Das, *Gossamer*, 114) Anima, a commonly found female name in Assam and Bengal, means ‘the power of becoming minute’, almost invisible. It also calls up associations with the Latin *anima mundi* or world soul that connects all living beings in the cosmos together. Das’s narrative voice in these poems, while being definitely female as understood by the use of feminine pronouns, is a being whose ontology it is difficult to define. Part woman and part air, she is, like Shakespeare’s Ariel, a wandering being who can weave herself into sentient and non-sentient entities alike, seeking connections with companion species and inanimate companionate articles of her world. In fact, Das’s Anima astonishes by her range and intensity of perception as she shuttles back and forth between humans, nature and objects with her non-discriminatory vision, embracing all that meets her eye. In Anima’s empathetic embrace of lifeless objects, one cannot help but recall the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget’s cognitive idea of Animism which he uses to refer to children’s belief of inanimate objects having human feelings and intentions. While to Piaget, this is an early and confused stage of cognitive development, ecopsychology looks upon animism as a higher form of cognition. Das’s Anima too, transcends the ordinarieness of humanity to arrive at an ecological integration with the world in the widest possible sense. Locating herself passionately in social interstices, Anima manifests herself as a cultural commentator attempting to vector a world rapidly losing itself under the debris of patriarchy, capitalism, economic development and environmental crises. Omnipresent and omniscient, she can weave herself into every context and offer a first-hand experiential account of things.

‘Anima Writes a Letter Home’, for instance, begins thus: “Dear mother and father and old and young people of my home. Dear pets and weeds and flowers and footfalls.” (Das, *Poetry Foundation*) The embracing of human and nonhuman in one tender address like this is, as the perceptive reader will note, a characteristic of Anima. In ‘Anima Dreams a Home’, Das writes:

I’ve seen the mortar cling to people’s sinews, cloying their heart. I’ve heard the cries from within cells of bricks and barriers. So now we take a fistful of sand, a sprinkle of cement from our body, a layering of bricks pieced from the kiln of our burning desire. The ground shifts and rivers burst forth on the roads that stopped us from finding home. (Das, *Café Dissensus*)

The ecological consciousness expressed in these lines is unique. The images of sand, cement, kilns, mortar and sinews overlapping with rivers and roads offer a radically nondual world for our contemplation. The final image of home in the poem is in the kneading of “the bread of freedom, the bread of fearlessness”, the act of kneading signifying a strong unitive act across disparateness and difference. (Das, *Café Dissensus*) In ‘Anima wakes up Tejimola’, Das conjures the feminist myth of Tejimola and amplifies its power by coupling it with the revolutionary agency of Anima, offering thereby a powerful vision of feminist intervention in the affairs of the world:



I, Anima, can feel Tejimola waking up inside me. Across acid fields, shanties, human dumps, torn dreams, electric wastes, I walk on. If you hear someone saying life in a sunrise voice, you must know it is us. Two women gone to three and four and more. We're waking up to take on the tangle and the tide. (Das, *Almost Island*)

Tejimola, a young female protagonist in a popular Assamese folktale, is a symbol of strength and resilience as she successfully withstands the attacks of her stepmother on her life by metamorphosing into one natural element after another. In bringing together Anima and Tejimola, Das underscores the invincible non-duality and the fertile ecological essence of the creative female self. In the following concluding lines of 'Anima traces a pestilence', the reader will almost experience a sense of magic realism as terse images of the pandemic drawn from the human and nonhuman spheres rapidly come together to offer a rarely intuitive collage of our ecological suffering:

I, Anima, am today a reflection of all thorns inside the rose-blush lungs. I'm the blue mask of our times, the choke spreading in our throbs. I'm also the flow that folds in all hearts, a spring water the girl facing the mirror is searching. There's a Swan Lake unfolding, the wings taking swipes, water and particles falling in bits and pieces like grace. I, Anima, will cleanse her tarnished hands, the crinkled brows, the breaths gone awry from our own squander. (Das, *Almost Island*)

The affected lungs are the colour of rose, the mask is the colour of the sky and the search is for spring water that will heal the ecology of our own squander. Val Plumwood points out how biospheric nature tends, in general, to be treated as an economic background, "as the taken-for-granted backdrop to market activities, as absorber of wastes and provider of limitless resources, noticed only when it threatens to fail to perform as required." (153) Das's transgressive poetry, however, draws ecology into the debates of rights and identity, making ecological issues an essential part of her politics for a plural world. In her radical nonduality, not only human meets nonhuman but animate empathetically meets inanimate, offering an inclusive vision of a non-hierarchical world where every entity has its place and purpose and nothing is unwanted or waste. Note, for instance, these lines from 'Anima re-arranges a nostalgia':

Shoes, old clothes, dismembered plastic cutlery, torn leaves, upturned buckets, caved in hutments, hole-punched asbestos roofs, shredded blue tarp sheets against the rains, and a sniff of autumn that feels like a perfume from another time. Even the sun is caught in the crepuscular sickle that shears all our pretence. The slow grace of caterpillars, the mayfly roosting on pores of algae growing like our myths, that one leaf dangling by its petiole from a bark too dark for us to see – all just a punctuation in the human clock. (Das, *Almost Island*)

Here is a catalogue of everyday human existence inevitably intertwined with the ordinary and commonplace in the natural world. Nabina Das's 'human clock' is not merely human but ecological in its ticking away across cycles and seasons. Her 'human' as is evident, embraces a wide ontological category that alienates no one and nothing. Every little entity – animate or inanimate – has its distinct place in the scheme of things and deserves attention and respect. Plumwood insists:

Recognising relationality of concerns and ends is clearly a necessary condition for a more adequate, less dualistic account of self and of its embedment in both social and ecological communities, as well as for the explication of non-instrumental alternatives and of such key concepts as friendship, acting in solidarity with, caring for others for their own sake, and recognising the other's intrinsic value. (154)

One finds Das's poetics imbued with solidarity for the world which should be everything that it is, sans hierarchy and sans boundaries. It is in her repeated embrace of and return to a dream of community-building that recognizes mutuality and interdependence that one meets a feminist politics that is both spatial and planetary. Significant to this politics is the fact that Das, in articulating her vision of nonduality does not, at any point, abandon her emphasis on identity. Identity and its discourses of making and unmaking constitute the major rallying point of her political voice which is clear, critical and unapologetically loud as she sifts through cultural scripts to question

the biases and bruises of power. Her ecological transcendence, one will realize, is not arrived at by negating or glossing over inequality and difference but through an intense poetic commitment to the subaltern, the marginal, the voiceless and the dispossessed across gender, class, region, ethnicity, sexuality, specie and sentience. It is important to note, as Sandilands points out, “that no identity manages to fully suture the polysemy of the social. Given the reference to a certain version of order, identity shapes itself according to a notion of what elements of life are integral to that order and what elements are merely noise.” (46) In Das’s articulation of identity in her poetry, one is aware of a stance of openness, even fluidity as a seamless merging of the orthodox and the unorthodox in the natural and human worlds takes place, this rare embracing of apparent paradoxes and contraries being due, no less, to the unique power of poetry.

Can poetry save the earth in the face of ecological crises like global warming, melting glaciers, rising seas, endangered species, water and air pollution, deforestation, strip mining, mountaintop removal, overfishing, overconsumption, overpopulation and so on, asks John Felstiner and answers in the affirmative, “For sure, person by person, our earthly challenge hangs on the sense and spirit that poems can awaken.” (357) Poems, Felstiner insists, have welded together the human and nonhuman for our perception even before environmentalism as a movement formally began. The intuitive oneness with nature that one feels as a child or even as an adult at intense emotive moments of one’s life can often be brought to us in a poem and in this “saving grace of attentiveness, and the way poems hold things still for a moment” (357) we become mindful of that ecological dimension of being larger than ourselves which though fragile, is resilient to the core. Science, policy, and activism, he suggests, have the potential to offer solutions to the environmental crisis, but something deeper must call us to it. This is accomplished by “poetry’s musical lift, attentive imagery, and shaping force, which stem from prehistory and live on.... In country or city, poems make a difference by priming consciousness.” (14–15) Felstiner writes:

If words tie us in one with nature, tying human with nonhuman, and if speech in the beginning brings all into being, maybe the speech of poems will revive our lease on life. We can count on this: the poems we hear have news for us. (15)

The poetry of Nabina Das brings us news too. “I, Anima, have been my own poet who walked the earth’s ways for thousands of years,” she writes. (Das, *Gossamer*, 114) This ecological awareness of continuity, connection and resilience is both news and psalm for the uncertain tomorrow towards which we are all headed with poetry’s healing and hope.

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# Reforming Representation from Plato to Godard

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**Abstract:** Plato's attack on poetry in *Republic X* has often been painted in an unflattering light. In this paper, I draw from modern criticisms of representative art such as Adorno and Brecht's to vindicate the import of Plato's concerns with imitation, and show how they might help understand its impact on society. Plato criticises representation, not when it imitates reality, but when it imitates appearances. This, however, need not depend on his ontological commitments. The criteria that culture must meet in the *Kallipolis* align with those that artists such as Brecht and Godard require for art to capture the ethical and political dimensions of reality.

**Keywords:** Republic, poetry, representation, Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Luc Godard

In *Republic X*, Plato famously bans “imitative” poetry from the ideal city (595a). This restriction is grounded on a twofold charge: a metaphysical concern about the status of poetry, among other crafts, as an imitation of sensible things, and a related claim about its psychological effects on its audience. Depending on the role ascribed to imitation, this might strike us as incompatible with Plato's own use of fictional and figurative elements to accompany philosophical argument. I suggest two ways in which this apparent incompatibility can be avoided, drawing from Plato's constraints on poetry and his own use of narrative and figurative elements. To complement his proposal, I include important counterparts in modern criticisms of art and culture. On one hand, this will suggest a way in which Plato's criticism can be reformulated without relying on metaphysical presuppositions. On the other, it will show how his antidotes against the dangerous effects of art on society apply beyond the medium of poetry itself.

## 1. Poetry, Craft and Metaphysics

I have mentioned that Plato's attack on poetry seems to rely quite heavily on his metaphysical framework. In Book X, Socrates' use of the term *paradeigmata* refers to single “ideas or forms”, which are “posited in the case of the various multiplicities to which we give the same name” (594a). For now, let us pass over how these ideas are “posited” over the many, and focus on how they are employed by craftsmen. When making a couch or a chair, both of which are “multiplicities”, craftsmen look to their corresponding ideas as models on which to fashion their products.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, a particular couch is not “the real couch, the couch in itself” (ibid) but only a likeness of its idea. Socrates then compares the process by which the craftsman imitates the real couch to that by which a painter copies the particular couch created by the craftsman. The painter is ranked among a class of producers who are “at a third remove from the truth” (597e), producing likenesses of other likenesses. Poets are subsequently included in this category at 598d. Their products are placed at the bottom of a hierarchical scale corresponding to three ontological removes:

- R1: Chair itself
- R2: Particular chair
- R3: Appearance of a chair

In turn, this scale gives rise to an epistemic charge concerning the reception of poetry by the audience. For, like shadows, or like reflections in a mirror, R3 objects may be mistaken for those in R2. The deceitful potential of these products is described in the following passage:

a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter (598b–c)

It is unclear whether children and foolish people mistake the carpenter for a real person, or whether they think the appearance captures how carpenters really are. At any rate, some aspect of the painter's representation is mistaken for reality, suggesting that the more skilful the imitator is, the more the public will conflate them. The trouble with this reading is that, from a metaphysical perspective, this renders Plato's dialogues no different from the imitations<sup>2</sup> he condemns. For they, too, are representations, and in this regard they belong in R3. We don't know, for instance, whether Plato's Socrates is meant to be the historical Socrates, or how closely the images of the democratic, just, and tyrannical cities resemble real-world – or realistic – counterparts. His fictional characters, colourful myths, and vivid imagery belong to R3 insofar as they resemble objects in R2, and would be in some sense subject to the confusion that Plato condemns. Though I retain the metaphysical schema in R1–R3, as well as his dialogues' status in R3, I will suggest ways of navigating these difficulties, drawing from Plato's psychology and his proposals for a successful education.

## 2. The Psychology of Imitation

In the craft analogy, the status of products in R2 and R3 as likenesses of higher ontological removes leads to a charge about the cognitive states they may induce, but one that stems from a more nuanced psychological picture than we may think. This motif is anticipated in Book V. Here, Plato discusses the epistemic status of “lovers of spectacles”, who

delight in beautiful tones and colours and shapes and in everything that art fashions out of these, but their thought is incapable of apprehending and taking delight in the nature of the beautiful in itself (476b)

He then describes this status as “opinion”, in contrast with the “knowledge” of those who are able to distinguish the many beautifuls from the Beautiful itself (*ibid*). While the latter recognise that the many beautifuls are an appearance, belonging to R3, the former mistake resemblance for identity (*ibid*). Plato's basis for this cognitive difference lies in the notion that, while knowledge is of “what is” unqualifiedly, opinion is of that which “both is and is not”. Thus, the things that are fine for lovers of spectacles “sometimes appear ugly and base” (*ibid*) and “both beautiful in a way and ugly” – for instance, beautiful or just for one person, but not for another. This helps us connect R1–R3 to the psychological charge against the imitative poet, who

sets up in each individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality, and by currying favour with the senseless element that cannot distinguish the greater from the less, but calls the same thing now one, now the other (605b–c)

The part or element of the soul to which poetry appeals, then, is the same that fails to distinguish the greater from the less, and the one that is solely capable of opinion and perception. At 523e, this is applied to the failure of vision alone to calculate the size of fingers, perceiving in them “no more one thing than its contrary” and making “no difference to it whether one of them is situated outside or in the middle” (523c). Just like the many beautifuls are beautiful in a way (at a certain time or for a certain person) and base in another, particular fingers are large in some ways and smaller in others.

As noted by Jessica Moss, the nonrational soul doesn't just fail to discern real life from its representation, but also holds mistaken perceptions about *value* (Moss 423). This relates to the idea that elements in R2 and R3 involve conflicting qualities, both evaluative and otherwise: justice and injustice; beauty and ugliness; largeness and smallness. When imitated by the painter

and the poet, representations are not just imitations of real-life people, but also of human excellence (Moss 430), whose contrary ethical qualities the public fails to distinguish. The difference between genuine goodness and apparent value is manifest in Plato's description of the democratic city, which appears

as a garment of many colours, embroidered with all kinds of hues, so this, decked and diversified with every type of character, would appear the most beautiful. And perhaps... many would judge it to be the most beautiful, like boys and women when they see bright-coloured things (557d).

Trying to lure in the audience, representations appeal to the sensory part of the soul – for instance, through colour and ornament – which mistakenly judges them to be good or beautiful. Rachana Kamtekar efficiently expresses this idea when she claims that human beings have a “permanently truth-indifferent belief-forming mechanism, and it is this that is vulnerable to the values represented in poetry” (Kamtekar 13). This same mechanism accounts for the misplaced praise of “multi-coloured” characters whose behaviour we would condemn in real life: grieving excessively, performing buffooneries, and giving in to our passions (606b–c).

The foregoing psychological picture seems to suggest that what makes poetry different from, and worse than, philosophy is that the latter engages *only* the rational soul, and the former, *only* the nonrational. Together with the metaphysical charge, it raises the following question: why would Plato choose to use images at all to carry his philosophical message across? The figure of Plato as an enemy of art in general is too crude: the dialogues themselves belong to R3, insofar as they represent Socratic conversations. A glance at Plato's prescriptive curriculum in the *Kallipolis* suggests that, in fact, intellectual ascent is made possible by studying objects in R2, if, and when, they are correctly used. For example, the stars are like “sparks that paint the sky, since they are decorations on a visible surface” (529c). But if astronomy is to be taught in a way that diverts the soul away from opinion,

we must use the blazonry of the heavens as patterns to aid in the study of those realities, just as one would do who chanced upon diagrams drawn with special care and elaboration by Daedalus or some other craftsman or painter (529d–e).

In this regard, the stars in R2 can point the soul in the direction of R1 – the truthful designs after which they are fashioned. I take this proposal as evidence for a more general reformist agenda: just as R2 objects can be used for good or for ill, so can representations be crafted “as diagrams with special care and elaboration” to summon the intellect. At 509a, for instance, the image of the sun is invoked to represent the Form of the Good, and at 510a, the image of the Divided Line illustrates the philosopher's ascent from the sensible realm to the intelligible. As Christopher Janaway notes, the clearest evidence for the fact that Plato allows for *some* representational elements in the *Kallipolis* is precisely the role that they play in his own argumentative strategy: “because each of us is a *plurality*, to address the *logistikón alone* would fail to persuade us” (Janaway 3, my emphasis). But just as astronomy must be taught differently, so must poetry, or those elements of poetry that Plato evidently uses, be reformed. In what follows, I offer two requirements to be met by any representational medium – including the dialogues, but spanning beyond them – that are sensitive to this point, drawing from Plato's few recommendations in this respect.

### 3. The Transparency Requirement

To substantiate the reformist agenda, I now provide the first of two requirements that can be applied to R3 to aid in the study of reality. In doing so, I draw from modern counterparts of Plato's overall concern, showing that it doesn't rely on such unpalatable metaphysical and psychological assumptions as the preceding discussion suggests. In *Transparencies on Film*, for instance, Adorno suggests that the way in which representation figures in a medium affects the way in which we receive it nonrationally:



Even when dialogue is used in a novel, the word is not directly spoken but is rather distanced by the act of narration – perhaps even by the typography – and thereby abstracted from the physical presence of living persons. Thus, fictional characters never resemble empirical counterparts no matter how minutely they are described. In fact, it may be due to the very precision of their presentation that they are removed even further from empirical reality... Such distance is abolished in film: to the extent that a film is realist semblance of immediacy cannot be avoided (Adorno 200).

Adorno's attack on film thus targets the same effect as Plato's: the possibility of mistaking R3 for R2, or the realist semblance of immediacy. This mirrors the dangerous resemblance of paintings to reality at 529d, and Socrates' contention that the imitative effect of poetry is produced when "one removes the words of the poet between and leaves the alternation of speeches" (394c). Though one may realise, upon reflection, that one is witnessing a representation (one does not *believe*, at any rate, that one is in the "physical presence of living persons", or of a real carpenter) there remains a subconscious level on which the distinction between reality and the medium representing it is blurred. It shows, moreover, that the charge is more serious than it seems: even when we are aware that a film is a mere projection, opacity impairs proper cognition of the image *as* an image, and may awaken – here, too, he agrees with Plato – certain irrational features of the psyche. I henceforth refer to this as the problem of *transparency*, which is that the appearance of a representation *as* reality is unavoidable: "its elements, however abstract, always retain something representational" (Adorno 202).

Another example from critical theory may serve to justify Plato's recipe for countering the semblance of transparency. Had Plato excluded all representation from the *Kallipolis*, his position would mirror Adorno's all-encompassing criticism. However, neither Plato nor Adorno's colleagues take this approach. For instance, Plato recommends that the poet make himself apparent to the audience as a producer of representations: "if the poet should conceal himself nowhere, then his entire poetizing and narration would have been accomplished without imitation" (393c). While the poet is allowed to represent objects from R3, he should do so in a way that they are manifest to the audience *as* appearances, just as the poet must show himself *as* a producer of such images, rather than assimilating himself "to another speech or bodily bearing an imitation of him" (393c1).<sup>3</sup> My boldest proposal in the present discussion is that, just as Plato's criticism applies across different artforms, so can his solutions be read independently of specific representational media. A remarkable example of this is Godard's struggle to undo what Jennifer Fay calls the "dishonesty of the camera's concealment" in his 1968 film *La Chinoise*:

Jean-Pierre Léaud's character, concerned that his political speech and posturing may appear to be insincere, addresses an offscreen director by looking into the camera. The reverse shot shows us the camera apparently filming him as if to assure the spectator that Jean-Pierre Léaud is indeed performing for a camera (Fay 117)

At such moments, Fay notes, characters are presented as conscious of the role that they are embodying, glancing into the camera, striking an "eyes-on" pose. Similar techniques throughout the film enable the medium to show itself as an image-producing mechanism, which, as Stanley Cavell notes, have made critics refer to Godard's films as "a cinematic equivalent to Brecht's call for a new theatre, in which the actor forces and maintains psychological and interpretive distance between himself and his role, and between stage and audience, thereby preventing a *sentimental* reabsorption of *the intelligence art secretes*" (Cavell 97, my italics). The careful positioning of the camera and the actorial techniques borrowed from Brecht seem to me, therefore, to play sobering role analogous to that of the poet's connections in dispelling the effects of representational immediacy, as when the poet leaves in his own words between dialogues. The aim is that the audience should not be so absorbed in the dramatic representation that they be vulnerable to the "truth-indifference" of values in R3. Instead, they should reflect on the features of R1 that the

poet – or the teacher of philosophy – is trying to highlight, if any. How this is achieved will be addressed in the ensuing section, which draws from Plato's own narrative elements and its echoes in Godard's adaptation of Brechtian theatre.

#### 4. The Dialectic Requirement

To prevent the nonrational soul from becoming absorbed in the lure of appearances, Plato prescribes a kind of 'non-imitative' narration that puts distance between R3 objects and the spectators, opening a space for critical distance. This, however, does not yet show that representations can promote the active involvement of the rational soul in reflecting on *value*, which was also misrepresented in R3. In any narration, places and characters will inevitably belong in R3. The question is whether the reform of poetry can avoid the confusion of values in the characters represented, as well as discern the medium of representation by means of the elements above.

Now, Plato includes non-virtuous characters – sophists, rhetoricians, and poets – in his work. But unlike Homeric heroes, they do not come through as instances of human excellence, but as mouthpieces for different viewpoints around the values brought into discussion. At 532a, the passage from perception to the intelligible realm is achieved through dialectics, which in turn becomes the last stage of Platonic education before the grasp of what is knowable (508d–e). In the *Cratylus*, Socrates describes the dialectician as "the man who knows how to ask and answer questions" (390c) – and this is precisely how Socrates addresses his interlocutors, the whole *Republic* being an instance of the question "What is X?" applied to justice, and investigated through the speakers' interactions. Eric Havelock describes dialectic more generally as

a weapon we suspect to have been employed in this form by a whole group of intellectuals in the last half of the fifth century... for arousing the consciousness from its dream language and stimulating it to think abstractly. As it did this, the conception of "me thinking about Achilles" rather than "me identifying with Achilles" was born (Havelock 209).

In this way, characters may serve to attract the audiences' attention and provide deficient, provisional accounts of the values they incarnate. But once they are recognised *as* likenesses, the audience can engage with the questions about virtue, justice, and knowledge that Socrates wants them to think about, engaging the rational soul.

A similar analysis may apply to beautiful imagery, which Socrates uses in a way that parallels the use "the blazonry of the heavens" to "arouse" the intellect. Contrast, for instance, the ornamental appeal of the 'multicoloured city' at 557d with that of the city envisaged throughout the interactions between Socrates and Glaucon. As Stephen Halliwell writes,

(Socrates and Glaucon) end the book by agreeing that such a person will engage in politics only 'in the city of himself', 'the city in words' which has been constructed in the course of the dialogue, a city which may exist only as an ideal 'model' but which is nonetheless a compelling standard by which the individual must 'found his own city' or 'make a new city of himself' (Halliwell 250)

This suggests a parallel between (i) the way the image of the city in the *Republic* is fashioned after Justice (ii) the way in which craftsmen fashion their objects with a corresponding idea in mind, and (iii) the way in which the audience is supposed to think *about* R3 objects (the values of characters or, in this case, political structures) in a way that leads to ethical and intellectual improvement.

In line with my parallel assessment of film and theatre, I believe transparent and dialectical elements work in tandem when deliberately applied to Godard's explicitly political oeuvre, and to any representational artform that shares Plato's concerns. Firstly, the former devices give away the status of characters in *La Chinoise* as "insincere": the nature of the medium shines through as fiction, and their ethical viewpoints are revealed as mere fancy. Cavell extends this idea to the role of colour, which instead of serving as embellishment or, as he puts it, "the necessity of luxury

or amusement” (Cavell 86), reveals that the whole political project is make-believe, mere child’s play (Cavell 101). Notoriously, the film is interspersed with images of communist figures, pop songs (including the refrain “Mao Mao”), shots from Soviet documentaries and propaganda, catchy slogans written on the wall and grandiloquent speeches which can only be described as sophistry: pure R3 appearance, but readily posing as such, and placed under dialectical scrutiny.

Secondly, that this reflects Godard’s criticism of his characters’ values is revealed in a long conversation between an older socialist professor and Véronique, one of the revolutionaries. Véronique discloses her plans to organise a terrorist attack, and the professor asks – in the fashion of the dialectician – whether she thinks her cause requires knowledge (*connaissance*) of the situation. Véronique replies that she does in fact *know* that “the situation” is wrong, and that her knowledge comes from “immediate experiences”, which she has been “studying” for years. On the screen flashes the slogan *Cette situation doit changer*, expressing the prevalent revolutionary dilemma in Godard’s context. Here, Godard can be seen as explicitly condemning this doctrine, and trying to distance the audience from the otherwise opaque representation. When the professor insists on the insufficiency of Véronique’s epistemic grounds for her ethical standpoint, the entire apparatus of the film is revealed as an appearance. According to Norman Silverstein, Godard’s success lies “less in his arguments than in his *mise en scène*”:

In staging the confrontation on a train that starts and stops, picks up speed and slows into a station, the scenery in the background reflects the passions of the debaters. As the philosopher and the young girl reach an impasse in their debate over gratuitous violence, the train stalls and the scenery behind them that has rushed by when they were most heated comes into clear focus. When the debaters are arguing most clearly and reaching toward final arguments, the background countryside is a blur of road, land, trees, and sky (Silverstein 53).

The distancing element, meant to emphasize the gap between reality and fiction in R2–R3, now becomes a way of forcing the audience away from direct identification with the speakers and into a critical attitude towards the views they have been seen to reflect. And this mirrors moments in which, throughout Plato’s dialogues, characters confront Socrates directly, only to see their world views dialectically downplayed. Lastly, this image provides a continuum between the previous values, whose status is now downplayed to a “blur,” and the increasing clarity they approach once they leave behind their colourful, make-believe world. One is even tempted to compare this scene to Plato’s Cave parable, where the philosopher looks back at appearances “with his eyes full of darkness”, having known the clarity of the sun through dialectics (516e). Unequivocally, then, Godard has not included his characters – nor their artificial communist society – as deceitful representations of excellence. Instead, he has shown how their values are deficient, and hinted towards the clearer horizon that Socrates envisages by the end of the *Republic*. At least in theory, the audience is supposed to pick up on these features of the film and revise previous intuitions on the objects of R1: justice and piety in Socrates’ dialogues; justice and revolution for Godard. Whether or not they succeed continues to be a matter of controversy, for students of film and philosophy alike.

## 5. Conclusion

At first blush, Plato’s attacks on poetry in the *Republic* seem both to undermine his own narrative methods and to rely on strong metaphysical and psychological presuppositions. While I accepted the threefold metaphysical schema (R1–R3), I rendered Plato’s concerns more plausible by comparing them to modern counterparts. Although the elements in Plato’s dialogues belong to R3, they are suited to his reformist agenda by dint of transparent and dialectical devices. So with Brecht and Godard’s approaches to theatre and film, which demand that artistic representations be made apparent as such by their conscientious producers. This shows that not only Plato’s

concern, but also his proposed solutions, are independent of poetry as a medium of representation. In this way, as in the study of astronomy, poetic images can find a way of attracting the nonrational soul, while simultaneously displaying appearances *as* appearances to reflect on philosophically.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It is hard to determine whether craftsmen “see” the Forms themselves (Griswold 145). For my purposes, what matters is that they and their products are closer to reality than artists’.
- <sup>2</sup> Plato is often taken to speak of “imitation” in two ways: as dramatic enactment, and as representation or depiction (Lear 195). Whether or not these different applications of the concept are justified, here I use it in the latter sense.
- <sup>3</sup> Here I refer to the second sense of “imitation” described by Lear. Again, whether Plato conflates the two is controversial.

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# Analysing the Anglo-Indian Identity: An Adolescent's Quest for Belonging in Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at a critical reading of Ruskin Bond's first novel, *The Room on the Roof* (1956), in order to examine how an adolescent Anglo-Indian experiences cultural anxiety in a varying postcolonial Indian landscape. British Empire left an indelible mark in the geopolitical fabric of the subcontinent after two centuries of colonial rule. Anglo-Indians, being a product of miscegenation and cultural annexation, left at the mercy of independent India by the British, were culturally and politically forced to make voluntary adjustments in the new changing geopolitical landscape. The hyphenated being of the community awoke suspicion and antipathy among their compatriots forcing a feeling of insecurity and rootlessness among its members. Cultural markers which distinguished them from the public: language, religion, cuisine, and clothing, became indicators for marginalisation. Ruskin Bond, being an Anglo-Indian himself, reflects upon the issues of growing up in India and their changing lifestyle and ideals, in his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*. This paper analyses Bond's attempt at reproducing Anglo-Indian life in Indian landscape; their lifestyle, struggles, and changing attitudes of its new generation members. Bond believes in the adaptability of the community in a testing situation and offers a positive approach to overcome their immediate cultural anxieties. It also enquires how the culturally disillusioned Anglo-Indians adapt to the changing post-colonial world.

**Keywords:** Anglo-Indian, post-colonialism, cultural identity, third space, imago, hybridity

## 1. Introduction

While retracing the history of the Indian subcontinent, its European colonial intervention and transaction should be carefully analysed. The British Raj, in a period spanning over two centuries – from mid-eighteenth century to mid-twentieth century – ruled the subcontinent and played a central part in the emergence of an independent Indian nation. The European rule spawned colossal changes in the lives of Indians. Waves of changes in the form of Industrial Revolution, modern communication, and rail transport reached the shores of Indian Ocean from Europe, riding on high mast schooners and brigs. The modernisation of colonial India had begun as a utility to help the coloniser accumulate and transport resources, raw materials, and finished goods to an international market.

At the same time, British rule<sup>1</sup> in India divided the myriad socio-political cultures of the landscape along the lines of religion, language, geographical location, and social standing. Exposure to an alien culture from another geopolitical landscape for over two centuries precipitated changes, appropriations, subversions, and origins of new cultures among the native Indian population. The cultural differences that were produced as a result of this interaction gave rise to new races, classes, hybrid identities, geopolitical locale, and subsequently formed into new communities.

The Anglo-Indian community materialised in India owing to miscegenation between the Europeans and Indians, and was politically acknowledged and divided based on gender.<sup>2</sup> As noted historian, S. Muthiah rightly points out, "in the 1911 census [when] the government of Lord Hardinge officially termed those of mixed blood, children born of European fathers and Indian mothers and children born of their offspring, as *Anglo-Indians*." Ruskin Bond, being a



member of the Anglo-Indian community, directly encountered and experienced the colonial and post-colonial India, which formulated a curious cultural position he found himself in during the dusk of Colonial India. Bond reflects his lived experiences as a teenager in his first novel, *The Room on The Roof*. The colonial inheritance he acquired by the virtue of his birth, the immediate social surroundings with which he interacted, and the type of education he received, places him perfectly to delineate the cultural atmosphere of colonial and post-colonial India. Rusty, the protagonist and a fictional twin of Bond, finds himself in a converging canvas of cultures: British, Anglo-Indian, and Indian simultaneously, which places him in a “Third Space.”

Homi K. Bhabha, a contemporary critical theorist, in his *Location of Culture* (1994), describes this cultural enclosure thus: “the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences.” Bhabha considers the third space as an important cultural zone where an identity is formed and reformed beyond the boundaries of different cultures habituating around it. The ‘in-between’ space formed between cultural locales facilitates transmission of cultures, generating hybrid cultures. Bhabha, in his *Location of Culture*, explains the construction of *hybridity* as: “interstitial passage between fixed identifications open up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.”

British culture dominated the subcontinent when it was in power, and post-independence, an Indian national culture occupied the prime position, the remaining cultures which did not subscribe to a majoritarian culture had to find refuge in interstitial cultural planes. E. B. Taylor, a reputed cultural anthropologist, defines *culture* as, “a complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” When the British left India, Anglo-Indians, a religiously and linguistically bound ethnic community were forced to adapt to a new horizon without a colonial sun ruling over it. The hybrid nature of the community came under the cultural crosshairs of new India, resulting in a mass migration of members to English speaking Commonwealth countries. Members who stayed back in India, to ensure the survival of the community, were forced to interact, experience, and sustain cultural transactions with the native Indians. They reinvented and readjusted to the world around them and these cultural chameleons constantly adapted their skills for survival. Ruskin Bond reflects on the struggles of the community and their search for a place of belonging, in his novel *Room on The Roof*. His personal encounters lead the narrative as he experienced the society as an insider and an outsider simultaneously, resulting in the formation of an anxious cultural crevice from which the protagonist constantly tries to escape.

Bond portrays Rusty, his Anglo-Indian protagonist, a confused teenager in an alien cultural landscape, being tolerant and open to new cultural interactions and bond formations. Rusty undergoes a cultural transformation by escaping from the European community in Dehra. The time he invested in an Indian village in Dehra opens up a multicultural world in front of him: a multilingual, pluri-religious, and caste-ridden society which provokes his cultural identity. Colonial prejudice bound in an Anglo-Indian teenager by a strict British guardian and a tightly knit European community undoes itself with his interaction with the despised ‘other’. Rusty befriends Indians and earns his livelihood in an Indian society, leading to his wilful participation in the community and a formulation of hybrid cultural transactions. Bond’s cultural position and colonial heritage provide him insights about the synchronic subcontinental culture characterised by its distinct individuality and extreme adaptability and not by cultural predation, stasis or binarism.

Rusty throughout the novel is in a constant search for a place of belonging. Being the only Anglo-Indian in a European settlement, the sixteen-year-old orphan copied the culture of the British and immersed himself in it. As political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson opines in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities* (1983), “it was precisely the sharing with the metropole of a common language (and common religion and common culture) that had made the first national imaginings possible.” Rusty practised the religion of the British nation and spoke their



tongue, his education, manners, cuisine and clothing made him identify with the culture of his father as he unconsciously repressed the culture of his mother. By breaking away from the European settlement, Rusty participates and witnesses his British cultural identity being lost at the border of the “country district of blossoming cherry trees” (Bond 10). The fair skinned boy takes a cultural leap into India and breaks his binary connection between the culture of a majority and a minority. The ‘in-between’ cultural position provides him with an alternative perspective through which he experiences and analyse the complexity of the present post-colonial world.

From this alternative perspective, Bond portrays the cultural anxiety and identity crisis of an Anglo-Indian teenager and the gradual changes in his opinions and interactions with an alien Indian society and its culture. The author depicts a changing social mentality of the community post-independence and their need for making linguistic adjustments. English, the mother tongue of the community, being the ruling language of the colonial India had provided them with privileges in the societal hierarchy. English language became a cultural marker of the European masters and Anglo-Indians along with their Christian religion. But as Anglo-Indian leader and historian, Frank Anthony opined in *Britain's Betrayal in India* (1969), “their hyphenated designation, implying a community of mixed blood, [perhaps] conjures up a contemptuous vision” among the British and Indians. Anglo-Indians faced discrimination simultaneously from the coloniser and the colonised as they held one-half of the despised-other inside them. The identity crisis followed, forced the community to hold on to their culture and hybridise it at the same time. This paper aims to trace the Anglo-Indian identity recorded in *The Room on the Roof* by regarding the post-colonial interactions and interventions that hybridised the cultural identity of Anglo-Indians.

In order to equip the Anglo-Indian community to a post-colonial India, Bond stresses on the importance of avoiding reminiscing to a period of colonial superiority, and reiterates the necessity for the community to stride along with Indians, through his teenage protagonist Rusty. Rusty embraces his diverse encounters and experiences in the multicultural world of India, and contrasts it with his disciplined European back ground. The lived experiences of Rusty in an Indian village provide Bond with adequate evidence to construct an optimistic post-colonial cultural view for the new Anglo-Indian. Bond disturbs the created negative stereotyping of an Anglo-Indian in literature by presenting the community from the inside.<sup>3</sup>

This paper reflects the life of an Anglo-Indian adolescent brought up in a European settlement inside the subcontinent, his escape into post-colonial India, the resultant interactions and challenges he faced with his personal integration into the Indian cultural fabric, while retaining his Anglo-Indianness. It compares and contrasts the European and Indian attitude towards the deracinated protagonist in terms of his appearance, language, manners and food habits. It also analyses the formation of a third space between the contact zones of two different cultures and the formulation of a hybrid cultural existence. The paper concludes by depicting the cultural anxiety experienced by the protagonist and his ensuing search for home in the Indian social structure.

## 2. Alien at Home

Ruskin Bond, an Anglo-Indian in post-colonial India, had witnessed the paradigmatic shift of a majoritarian culture, from British to Indian. The British position of power and social superiority faded away with Indian independence and a multicultural world of India awaited an Anglo-Indian who chose to stay back. Born in colonial India in 1934, Bond witnessed both the British Raj and post-colonial India. His English education in a colonial and post-colonial background, and exposure to different geopolitical ethos positively fashioned cultural hybridity in Bond. The multiplicity of cultures he encountered at different contact zones of India and abroad helped him to develop and understand the ambivalent cultural position of the Anglo-Indians in a global context. Bond empathised with the multiple cultures he encountered, and his adolescent anxieties are evidently reflected in his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, which he completed during his teenage years in England.

Rusty, his fictional twin, harbours reservations about his appearance and compares his features with everyone else in his geographical locale. "His guardian was pink, and the missionary's wife a bright red, but Rusty was white" (Bond 11). The question of racial comparison unconsciously infiltrated his inquisitive adolescent mind posing a question of belonging. Geographically placed in India, yet at the same time belonging to an alien culture, a European cultural prejudice saturated the inhabitants of the community who culturally located themselves outside India. As Edward Said opines in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), "no Westerner needed ever to see himself, mirrored in the eyes of the subject race, as anything but a vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj." By voluntarily excluding themselves from a multicultural society and by refusing to intermingle with Indians, the European community of Dehra held on to a racial and cultural superiority stemmed from an obsolete colonial vanity.

Rusty identifies himself with the European community which raised him. In the beginning of the novel, Rusty regularly compares his reflection in the dressing table mirror with a European image he had in his mind. But the reflected image of a white boy, "who looked slightly Mongolian" (Bond 11), poses a racial question at him and his search for an answer destabilises his cultural heritage. The image he observes in the mirror turns into his imago by which his subconscious identifies a cultural bond with the community. Jacques Lacan defines *imago* as "an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect." The perceived imago of "a fair Mongolian" unsettles Rusty and the mystery surrounding his parents enhances his suspicion. Bond faced suspicions and anxieties about his identity in the subcontinent and later in England, dislocated away from his familiar cultural plane. It is important to note that, while completing the novel in England, far removed from home, his protagonist was searching for an identity and a home.

The geographical dislocation forced Bond to hold on to his homeland links and is subsequently reflected in the novel. Being an Anglo-Indian in England was culturally challenging as the 'Indian' inside him was looked on with suspicion bordering on revulsion by the British. Herbert Stark in his Anglo-Indian treatise, *Hostages to India* (1936), points out how British society considered it a political inconvenience to have Anglo-Indians in England because "the imperfections of the children, whether bodily or mental, would in process of time be communicated by intermarriage to the generality of people of Great Britain." Placed inside the territory, yet outside its culture, Bond's nostalgia for his homeland created new dimensions for Rusty.

Bond presents Rusty as the only adolescent in his community, but his manners and attire separated him from the rest of his peers. With his "flannel trousers, sandals, [and] the thick hide belt around his waist" (Bond 3), Rusty was an Englishman in costume, but to outsiders Rusty represented the European image of a white boy as Somi notes, "A European boy was no longer a common sight in Dehra" (Bond 1). After Indian Independence, most of the Europeans settled in Dehra left the country, for Britain, and the presence of a European raised curiosity in Indians. Somi, a turban-clad boy from Punjab, befriends Rusty, and his interactions with others from his village in Punjabi isolated Rusty from their cultural interactions due to his linguistic deficiency. English, the lingua franca of the Europeans became obsolete among the Indians. Somi conversed in English to Rusty while he mutely listened to a foreign tongue spoken by the Indians around him. The inability to communicate with the society around him or to connect with their culture burdened Rusty with cultural apprehension which he subconsciously blames on the insulate nature of his culture.

For Alison Blunt, in her *Domicile and Diaspora* (2005), British domesticity in India meant "reproducing an empire within as well as beyond home". The country born Anglo-Indians, more European than the Indian, imagined Britain as their homeland and thought of themselves as part of an imperial diaspora in British India. Rusty, follows this imaginary identification with his fatherland and becomes a victim of de-colonisation in due process. The constructed imago of an Englishman is shattered when Rusty observes his imperfect reflection in the dressing table mirror and he faces the question of racial purity on the day of Holi, the Indian festival of colours. Rusty breaches his societal contract and secretly participates in Holi, a religious festival, in the

Indian village by spraying himself in colours. The boys in the village accept Rusty and when Ranbir states: "Now you are one of us" (Bond 26), Rusty sheds his European outfit. His participation in the ritual provides him with a newfound understanding towards Indian culture and a sense of belonging among his peers and in his motherland.

In contrast to what Rusty experiences in a day, his guardian, Mr. John Harrison, an Englishman in India, who embodies the colonial prejudice and superiority of his culture believes in what Edward Said later detailed in his *Orientalism* (1978), "no Oriental was ever allowed to see a Westerner as he aged and degenerated". A European who socialized with Indians and their culture was considered as an outcast by the racially proud European. When Harrison catches a glimpse of Rusty soaked in colours, his rage is justified by the cultural superiority he represents. By throwing Rusty out of his home and labelling him "filth", Harrison punishes the boy for crossing the inherited cultural boundaries and questions his identity by uttering the words: "How can you call yourself an Englishman?" (Bond 29). Rusty, sealed inside the ethnic boundary of Britishness, receives his ultimate cultural shock when Harrison unravels his heritage and humiliates him for not restraining his hunger for the barbaric Indian culture. The revelation by Harrison, "You look like the Mongrel that you are" (Bond 29) reduces Rusty to a nobody and he instantly becomes a traitor and an outsider to the cultural identity he owed allegiance to.

Rusty reacts violently to the situation by exerting force on his guardian. The shattered imago of his English identity persuades him to raise his voice against European authority for the first time in his life. Rusty slaps Harrison and pushes him out of his home. Rusty's realisation that "he could inflict pain" (Bond 30), attests to his ruthless expression of cultural disinheritance. Rusty becomes a stranger in his spatial setting, physically alienated from India and Europe overnight, as his ethnicity constantly questions his cultural allegiance. He faces the question of definition in a society, and being uprooted from his cultural plain, the adolescent escapes into India to search for a place of belonging.

Bond won the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize for his first novel, *Room on the Roof*, in 1957. Being an Anglo-Indian, and writing in English about life in India, he represented the dilemmas he faced when he discovered the real 'India'. Although being kindly received by the Western readership and critics and awarded a prestigious honour for a Commonwealth writer under thirty for 'an outstanding literary achievement', Bond was criticised by John Wain for writing in "*babu English*". *Babu English* and *chee chee English* are pejorative colonial terms reserved for an Anglo-Indian and his limited linguistic capability in English. Bond's hybrid culture becomes a negative marker in the eyes of a European when the language he speaks is illegitimated by the British linguistic pride. John Spencer, a sociolinguist, evaluates the regional attitudes towards the English language spoken by Anglo-Indians in colonial India thus:

Predictably, the British in India provided [the Anglo-Indians] and their accent with a pejorative name, *chee-chee*; British attitudes towards the accent also appear to have been absorbed by many middle-class Indians.

Of all the cultural markers that create a collective identity for a community, its *lingua franca* holds a vital position. The English of the Anglo-Indian fashioned familial and societal bonds between the members as well as made interactions with the outside world possible. By delegitimizing a language as subpar, the expression of a community is irreverently questioned and their position in the social pyramid challenged. Bond formulated all these uncertainties and angst of an Anglo-Indian adolescent into Rusty while conceiving and reproducing him in letters.

Salman Rushdie remarks about being an Indian English writer outside India in *Imaginary Homelands* (1992) as, "to be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition. What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India?" An adolescent Bond resisted his physical alienation from India while writing as an outsider in England by holding on to the experiences of his homeland. Intersections of culture Bond came into contact with equipped him

to tackle the changing post-colonial world and to appreciate the multicultural nature of his community in a global perspective.

Rusty restructures his identity at the intersection of cultures he finds himself in and gradually adapts to an Indian life. On the night of his escape, he survives his mortifying existential crisis by seeking shelter in the village of Dehra. "It was a vast empty space" (Bond 33), thought Rusty when he finds the village ground, as it symbolises the anxious liminal space he occupied between British and India. The rainy night he spent alone on a "hollow under the bench" (Bond 33), provided Rusty with an independent space of his own: one which is neither English or Indian. The formation of a spatial crevice at the intersection of cultural boundaries ensured sanctuary and a hope for survival to the colonial refugee.

Later, Rusty becomes his own master by earning employment at the Kapoor household and lodging himself at the room on the roof. The room provides Rusty with an open view into the Indian landscape. "In his room, Rusty was a king. His domain was the sky and everything he could see" (Bond 66). The village water tank outside the room, where the village came daily to bathe, educates Rusty about the rustic Indian lifestyle as he interacts with Indians. By being independent and earning a position in the society, Rusty acclimatises himself to an Indian setting without colonial prejudices or reservations. He forms jovial ties with his peers: Somi, Ranbir, and Kishan, and each of them becomes a window for Rusty to understand the new cultural space he inhabits.

Rusty redefines his cultural identity to belong in his new home. Stuart Hall, a noted cultural theorist, describes *cultural identity* in his essay, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* (1989) as, "a collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'" and in the case of Rusty, finding a 'true self' was next to impossible. He severs his British roots to find meaning from a post-colonial India without ruminating on the cultural narratives of his past. In the spectrum of cultures, Rusty fluxes between the paradoxical polarities of British and India. What determines his identity surfaces from his response to the contradicting cultural contexts he interacts with and how the experiences harmoniously co-exists inside him, thereby, transforming him into a modern heir of multiculturalism. Hall also stresses on the importance of the uniqueness of a culture<sup>4</sup> by analysing cultural overlaps that provide meanings to the existence of a new cultural identity. Hall further clarifies: "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of *becoming* as well as *being*. It belongs to the future as to the past." The duality of the cultural roots identified and retained inside Rusty, reinforces his ability to adapt into a cosmopolitan society.

### 3. Adopting the 'Indian' while adapting to the Indian

Rusty opens his senses to the cultural synthesis of India by living in the village of Dehra. He interacts with diverse religions, experiences various cuisines, practices new customs, and clothes himself in different outfits. The Indianisation of the adolescent Anglo-Indian nurtures in him a newfound respect and familiarity to his motherland. Somi, a turbaned Sikh, befriends Rusty and takes him under his wing in the beginning of the novel. As a displaced Punjabi and a witness of religious persecution following the Partition of India, Somi and his family shelters Rusty. Rusty's outfit, borrowed from Somi consists of a "long white shirt" with "high collar and broad sleeves" and "a pair of white pajamas" (Bond 38), contrasted with his familiar fashion of clothing and promptly converts him into an Indian youth. The life in the village helps him comprehend his cultural multiplicity and seek answers to his ethnic angst.

Bond focuses on the integration of his protagonist into the cultural fibre of India. By appreciating the local smells and flavours, Rusty cultivates a palate for Indian food and his frequenting the *chaat-wallah* with his friends attests to his approval of the societal eating habits in his locale. Bond describes the chaat shop owner as a "shining god" as "with his deft, practised fingers, he moulded and flipped potato cakes in and out of the pan" and served "it in plates made out of banana leaves" (Bond 15). Rusty's time in the village of Dehra begins with him donning Somi's clothes and

eating a meal “consisted of curry and curd and chapattis<sup>60</sup>” (Bond 39), which are evidently Indian. Rusty becomes a regular visitor at the chaat-shop consuming *tikkees*, *alu-cholle* and *gol-guppas*, while socializing with Indians and their culture. His voluntary adoption of an Indian lifestyle provides him emotional and cultural respite, as he discovers a place he belongs in.

The daily routines of the Anglo-Indian changes with his arrival in the village. Like all the villagers, he fetches water for himself in a *bhisti* (water carrier) and bathes at the village tank. He travels around the village with Somi in his bicycle and immerses himself in the hustle and bustle of India. Rusty experiments with regional remedies to alleviate the effects of tropical climate, pest problems, and for his personal care. He participates in local gatherings and interacts with his peer group by playing local sports like cricket, football and hockey. Bicultural existence of Rusty at a cultural interface is reflected in the way he converses to his friends. Martin Nakata defines *Cultural Interface* as, “the intersection of the Western and Indigenous domains.” When Rusty exclaims, “So, *bhai* no chaat shop!” (Bond 81) to Kishen in the novel, it depicts the linguistic influence of the cultural milieu he locates himself at. By integrating Hindi into his mother-tongue English, Rusty transmutes himself into a synchronic multicultural existence through his linguistic adaptability. Nakata delineates the convergence and overlapping of multiple cultures at a spatial zone by stating:

“It is not strictly about the replacement of one with the other, nor the undermining of one by the other. It is about maintaining the continuity of one when having to harness another and working the interaction in ways that serve Indigenous interests.”

Bond's portrayal of a cultural crevice formed by the intersection of conflicting cultures creates what Homi K. Bhabha terms as a “Third Space” in the novel *Room on the Roof*. Rusty, positioned at the cultural juncture gains an accommodating perspective on the multiplicity of cultures and benefits from it through his personal interaction. His search for an identity and a place for belonging rewards the adolescent with a temporary answer during his life in the village which prepares him for a life in post-colonial India.

#### 4. Conclusion

By placing Rusty at a cultural interface, Ruskin Bond represents the lived realities and societal hierarchies existing in post-colonial India. Central to the constructed *imago* and image of Rusty being an outsider were the factors that: 1) he was a product of miscegenation and 2) he possessed a hybrid cultural identity. This dual quality was viewed with apprehension, which in turn delegitimised and questioned his existence in India and England. The demands of identifying himself with a specific nationality compels Rusty into leading a hybrid cultural life which he gradually eases himself into. The challenges that arise out of Rusty's life point towards the problems of ethnicity, language, religion and nationality that it becomes particularly important to give attention to such issues which are excessively in vogue.

Writing from the inside of the Anglo-Indian community, Bond not only challenges the negative stereotypes that are in place, but effectively breaks them when he finds answers to the questions regarding his search for a place to belong in his motherland by formulating Rusty, an heir to a multicultural post-colonial world, as being fully aware of his identity through his real, cultural transactions. As he occupies the “Third Space” in the room on the roof and becomes a part of India which moves forward, his assimilation into the social fabric of the country is complete. Rusty emerges as an individual who comes into terms with his identity and matures into a confident human being aware of his bicultural existence.

Bond unmistakably discloses his own trepidations as Rusty's ambitions and anxieties, which are presented openly when Rusty responds to Kishen in the novel by stating, “I'm going to be a writer. I'll write books. You'll read them.” (Bond 59). As the prophetic words of the author materialize in the future, the existential question he pondered over in his adolescence provides



him with a clearer answer which he states in the introduction of the novel, 37 years after its first publication, thus: "I have since answered these questions for myself, certain that I am Indian as the dust of the plains or the grass on the meadow."

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Shashi Tharoor, in his *Inglorious Empire* (2017), isolates the legacy of the British Raj by examining the impact of the imperial enterprise on the subcontinent thus: "with the shattering of age-old barriers and the erection of new ones within India, [through] the resultant mongrelization of language and culture; the tug of conflicting loyalties to family, caste, religion, country and Empire; and, above all, the irresistible lure of lucre, the most profound animating spirit of the colonial project."
- <sup>2</sup> According to the Constitution of India, Article 366(2), to be considered as an Anglo-Indian, a person's ancestry must be tracked back to a European forefather and not to a European maternal line.
- <sup>3</sup> Bryan Peppin, in his critical work *Black and White* (2012), places Ruskin Bond, Allan Sealy, and Frank Anthony together as 'the Insiders.' For, they provided, through their works, the reader with an inside picture of the community without reducing the characters into stereotypical tropes.
- <sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall, in his essay, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* (1989), remarks that the constructed cultural binaries of 'one experience, one identity' should be challenged. He emphasises on the importance of 'a second view of cultural identity' by acknowledging 'its other side' through disruption and discontinuities, constitute a unique cultural identity for a community.

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## Book Reviews

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ADORNO'S AESTHETICS AS A LITERARY THEORY OF ART. By Mario Farina. London and Switzerland: Springer Nature/Palgrave Macmillan. 237 pp.

The copious literature that has accrued on aspects of Adorno's philosophy of art continues to spring forth. Its principal source lies in the pellucid waters of the *Aesthetic Theory*, tantalisingly incomplete at the author's death in 1969, but there are many tributary currents reaching back to his earliest reflections on music, his visceral recoil at the protocols of the popular song of the 1930s, his readings of the shifting ideologies of modernism. There are false trails here and there. Theodor Wiesengrund, the seventeen-year-old author of a journal article on expressionist theatre, who damns the naturalistic drama of the 1890s as outmoded 'trash', will receive short shrift forty years later from the more reflective Adorno, who unmasks those inclined to condemn the great works of naturalism as outmoded for the ahistorical philistines they are. Mario Farina, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Florence, argues in the present work that, of all these currents, the one that most surely provides the key to unlocking the complex mechanism of the Frankfurt thinker's aesthetics is his theory of literature. If all art, construed as an autonomous category in the form of the aesthetic, exists at a remove from society, it finds its function thereby in the critique of the very social existence that produces it. The explicit discursivity of literature aids it in this task, so that while the visual depiction of natural beauty in oil on canvas, for example, cannot escape the commodification to which all aesthetic objects, as objects, are susceptible, the literary representation of it – even the literary representation of paintings themselves, as in the ekphrastic passages in Proust – occupies a zone beyond the reach of reification.

It is for this reason that Adorno argues in the *Aesthetic Theory* that works of art all harbour something like a linguistic quality, even where their techniques bear no relation to the semantic structuring of language, as in music. Farina highlights a moment in Adorno's ruminations on the new music of the atonal and twelve-tone schools, in which he states that serial compositions are prepared to incur the risk of being magnificent failures, a judgment, Farina observes, less obviously applicable to the literary representation of the twelve-tone violin concerto in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), for which Adorno stood service as musicological consultant. The more artworks approach the condition of a literal address to reality, even where explicitly critical of it, as with the politically engaged works of novelists and dramatists such as Sartre and Brecht, the more they traduce the authenticity of art's challenge to a faulty reality. 'Art does not come to know reality by depicting it photographically...' he writes in the essay, 'Extorted Reconciliation', 'but by expressing, through its autonomous constitution, what is concealed by the empirical form reality takes.'

Late capitalist society, Adorno argued in the postwar period, needs a form of artistic expression that 'leaves no material untransformed', a task for which literature is uniquely equipped. The great amnesia that set in during the post-1945 reconstruction in Germany, which produced humanist verse that celebrated life's enduring loveliness, less than a decade after the same culture was conducting mass burials of the asphyxiated and the half-dead in the killing camps, was self-evidently corrupt, but a new generation of writers that was prepared to look alienated experience in the eye, and faithfully record it through blasting apart the formal conventions of the arts, offered hope. 'Extorted Reconciliation' represented Adorno's dismissal of the claim of Georg

Lukács that modernist art was a diseased subjectivist tendency to which the socialist realism of the Eastern bloc, in which he served the role of cultural functionary, when not being punished for occasional deviations that only the state authorities could see, was the healthy antidote. If art was to do nothing more than reflect a reconciled reality, it would be no more needful to human amenity than candy-apples.

Not merely literature itself, though, but the means of addressing it was of crucial significance, as Adorno suggested in a short radio address of 1952, 'On the Crisis of Literary Criticism'. The critique of literature must turn on social critique, not evaluations of its literariness. What was the skill of a well-turned metaphor, compared to the need for it to tell the truth about the forces of history? 'Criticism has power only to the extent to which every successful or unsuccessful sentence has something to do with the fate of humankind,' Adorno states. The interiority in those literary works that first took up the technique of the interior monologue, those of Proust, Joyce, Woolf and others, is not the solitary solipsism that Lukács claims to detect, but is itself, as Adorno puts it, 'socially mediated and essentially historical in substance'.

Farina is an attentive exponent of Adorno's literary aesthetics, delineating its principal reflections with capable succinctness. A philosophy of literature in the Frankfurt manner, he shows, involves elucidating the nature of literary works in the framework of a historical understanding of reality, literature being itself a product of social labour. In a skilful section on the work of Franz Kafka, he expounds Adorno's notion, gleaned from the 'Notes on Kafka' in *Prisms*, that there is a need in Kafka's writing first of all to take everything literally. What happens to Joseph K. in *The Trial* is in itself of primary importance, before one considers what it might symbolise or represent about the human condition. Too much existentialist reading of Kafka – and also, notoriously, of Beckett – brushes past the explicit content in search of those all-important metaphors that express, in liberal humanism's favourite cliché, 'what it means to be human'. A man is arrested for something he hasn't done. When he is killed like a feral dog at the end of the story, he sees a window opening in the distance, from which a figure throws forth its arms in apparent sympathy. These matters are hideous enough, and expressive enough, in themselves to be worth dwelling on them in themselves, before we hurry past them in quest of the elusive hidden meaning that emerges like the bit of comfortless wisdom from the fortune-cookie.

There are inevitable parallels here with the hermeneutic approach of psychoanalysis, as Farina goes on to elaborate, but what the exegetical attitude often misses is precisely that it is what strikes the dreamer about the dream in the course of relating it afterwards, the emphases and articulations that he gives it, that constitute its true meaning, not the arcane occultism that fixes an objective symbolic meaning on every concrete object and action. In this way, too, fragmentary details speak the truth more tellingly than the whole. When Gregor Samsa reawakens after his family's first horrified discovery that he has become a giant bug, he finds something has been left for him, 'a basin filled with fresh milk in which floated little sops of white bread'. The prospect fills him with hungry glee until he discovers, not only that the injury the family has inflicted on him prevents him from feeding in comfort, but that, in his new insectile condition, he no longer likes milk. Dehumanisation starts at these mundane, and darkly surprising, levels.

In the final chapter of this book, Farina tries out an Adornian literary analysis on three canonical beacons of American postmodern fiction: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), three texts published in the years since Adorno's death, each of which, in its singular technical fashion, is about the fate of mass psychology in modern experience. These gigantic novels are collections of fragmentary diegetic phenomena, representing a disintegrative world in face of which the narrator himself retreats into an unstable orbital state, split like the atoms whose splitting determined the course of the twentieth century. In the Pynchon, particularly, the chaotic experience of warfare, and the multiple conspiracy theories it generates, stand for a contemporary condition in which, within

an overarching administered structure as implacable as total war, nothing is fixed. Paranoia generates its own scientific principles, themselves as vaporous as the smoke that rises from the bomb-craters: 'Paranoids are not paranoids (Proverb 5) because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations.' It might be true once, and then never again, or not at all. Who knows?

Mario Farina's study is substantially compromised, sad to relate, by the frankly ghastly English in which the Italian author has boldly tried to write it. Many sentences regularly need reading two or three times before their strangled meaning emerges from the verbal contortions, and the regular recourse to superfluous parentheses – 'in fact' is a regular favourite of the author's – hardly helps. The blame for this state of affairs lies less with an academic chancing his arm in a second language than with an academic publisher that, while reserving the right to charge the earth for an intellectual work, sees no need for a qualified proofreader to make it sound coherent.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE. By Sukanta Chaudhuri (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 515 pp.

W. B Yeats in his introduction to 'Gitanjali' noted that Tagore, "like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity" (Tagore xx). The book being reviewed here is a comprehensive collection of articles and essays by leading Tagore experts from India and Abroad. The book is classified into two parts: Part I Overviews and Part II Studies. The articles present both a diachronic and synchronic study of the life and works of Tagore. In the introductory chapter 'A Garland of Many Tagores' reflects the visionary poet's pluralistic attitude and belief in diversity through the words of Anisuzzaman, "We must look at the garland of many Tagores not as a string of disjunct elements but as an organic, integral whole" (Chaudhuri 22). 'Rabindranath and His Times' by Biswajit Ray provides the background to Tagore's personal life, his education and love for literature, his vision and creation in the changing world.

As a person who believed in modernity as "both contemporary and beyond time" (Chaudhuri 35) Tagore epitomizes the Indian philosophy of the changing times. 'Tagore's Poetry' by Sukanta Chaudhuri underscores Tagore's preoccupation with the themes of Divine-devotee relationship, love and nature. Banabini 'The Voice of the Forest' under the title 'The Life of Plants' represented through the lines, "Earth and Sky are sunk in deep sorrow...Mother Earth clasps the smallest blade of grass to her bosom and cries, 'I won't let you go.'" (Chaudhuri 65) and the respect for women's lives and women's being through the analysis of the text 'Manasi' (Woman of the Mind) may interest eco-critics and ecofeminist thinkers. Tagore's interest in music and songs is studied by Ashish Lahiri in his essay 'Something of a Musician -Tagore's Songs'. The author provides a comprehensive view of the musical tools used by Tagore that includes: *dhrupad*, the Hindustani classical music, the *kirtan*, inspired by his devotion to Radha and Krishna, the Bangla *Tappa*, the modern Bangla songs, the Baul folksongs of East Bengal, western music of Beethoven and Bach as mentioned to Romain Rolland and the South Indian Carnatic music. Tagore's belief in 'Unity in Diversity' is reiterated by his ideas in his essay 'Tapovan' (Forest of Purity),

Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest, not the city. India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man...

The culture of the forest has fueled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life, which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilization. (Shiva 55-56)

Tagore was greatly influenced by the dramatic techniques of Shakespeare. His themes ranged from love, nature, society, and environment as discussed by Ananda Lal in his essay 'Rabindranath Tagore: Drama and Performance'. The plays uphold environmental consciousness and relevance to the 21<sup>st</sup> century readers.

Two of Tagore's finest and most difficult, politically symbolical works, *Muktadhara* (The Free Stream, 1922) and *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleander, 1924), emerged in the next decade. They forcefully indict the oppression of subjugated people and exploitation of the earth's resources – *Muktadhara* on damming rivers and *Raktakarabi* on digging mines – while embodying in their protagonists the spirit of self-sacrifice for a noble cause. It is chastening that, though Tagore raised these issues nearly a century ago, only in recent times has the world begun to rethink the value of massive dams and to realize the havoc caused by open mining (Chaudhuri 106).

Likewise, 'An Ecology of the Spirit Rabindranath's Experience of Nature' by Aseem Shrivastava underscores Tagore's ecological vision which may serve as a guiding principle for the modern-day environmental thinkers and ecocritics.

'Imagined Worlds: The Prose Fiction of Rabindranath Tagore' by Supriya Chaudhuri celebrates the short stories of the great artist who created the evergreen characters like Ratan in 'The Postmaster', Uma in 'Khata', Binodini in 'Choker Bali', Charu and Amal in 'Charulatha' many of them reincarnated in Satyajit Ray's classic films. Fakrul Alam provides an exhaustive overview of Tagore's Writings in English. The article begins with the discussion of his magnum opus 'Gitanjali' and its reception by the western audience.

Taking considerable liberty with the Bengali sources – the kind of liberty only a creative writer could exercise with his own work – Tagore made the English versions almost original compositions or, at the very least, considerably reworked versions of the intricate, emotionally intense, and musically rich Bengali poems. (Chaudhuri 160)

Alam goes on to discuss the less popular works with great literary merit and philosophical underpinnings that bear a resemblance to the transcendentalist ideas of Emerson and Whitman. Harish Trivedi's 'Tagore and Indian Literature: Influence and Presence' is a seminal essay for scholars of Indian literature and translation studies with emphasis on mediation, resistance and reception. Similarly, mutuality, transformation and co-construction of literary connections and communications across borders is the central concern of Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta. Tagore and the Visual Arts by R. Siva Kumar provides fresh perspectives on his paintings and art forms with images ranging from a doodle of *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleander) to a dramatic scene with five figures.

Part II provides wide-ranging research essays and articles on specific topics related to the works of Rabindranath Tagore, such as gender concerns of women, family, children with contemporary relevance for example the character of Chitrangada who utters, "I am the princess Chitrangada: not a goddess, nor any ordinary woman. You cannot raise me aloft by worshipping me, nor keep me neglectfully yet make me follow you (Chaudhuri 251). 'Women, Gender, and the Family in Tagore' Himani Bannerji enumerates the social reforms of Brahmo Samaj and the influence on Tagore such as, "The most important legislations centred on women and the family. They comprised the banning of sati or widow-burning (1829), legalizing widow remarriage (1856), and determining the minimum age of marriage (1860) and the age of consent (1891). There followed legislation on polygamy, rape, and prostitution. presents his ideals of social reformation" (240). Likewise, the world of children becomes a pertinent area of study in Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's essay, 'On the Seashore of Endless Worlds Rabindranath and the Child'. For Sabyasachi

Bhattacharya, Tagore's nonfiction provides ample evidence of his view of history where she confirms "Tagore never wrote history in narrative form: his interventions in historiography were chiefly in the form of critique" (Chaudhuri 269).

Tagore's *View of Politics and the Contemporary World* by Sobhanlal Datta Gupta has some political lessons guided by his "spiritual aura" (Chaudhuri 285) to the present-day reality. Kathleen M. O'Connell's essay Tagore's 'Santiniketan Learning Associated with Life' painstakingly traces the origin, history, vision and mission of this alternative system of a poet's theory of education and its impact on the contemporary world. 'Tagore and Village Economy- A Vision of Wholeness' by Sourin Bhattacharya throws light upon Tagore's holistic philosophy of sustainable living and peaceful coexistence shaped by the life-affirming principles of *Shri Samaj* and *Atmashakthi*. Tagore's rendezvous with the western science and his association with Einstein is introduced by Partha Ghose in his essay, 'Rabindranath and Science'. Rabindranath Tagore's aesthetics and his role as a literary critic are discussed by Jayanti Chattopadhyay and Swapan Chakravorty. 'Rabindranath, Bhakti, and the Bhakti Poets' by France Bhattacharya outlines Tagore's understanding and integration of his religion, spirituality and mystical thought. These essays quintessentially showcase the multidimensional trajectory of literary sensibilities and critical responses of the scholars from the East and the West.

A literature student or scholar who is seldom introduced to Tagore may experience the same anguish of the persona in Song 50 of *Gitanjali*, "But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little grain of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all". This extremely readable book aspires to be a Bible in Tagore Studies and inspires young researchers and academicians to revisit and reread the literary classics and the life-affirming philosophies of the great visionary and master storyteller to suggest ways out of the challenges and crises of the 21st century and recreate a world "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" (*Gitanjali* Song 35).

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IMPERFECT SOLIDARITIES: TAGORE, GANDHI, DU BOIS AND THE GLOBAL ANGLOPHONE. By Madhumita Lahiri. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020. 232 pp.

Translating is an academic exercise that involves riddling ramifications whether in language or in poetry. I use the term 'poetry' to juxtapose, and perhaps, draw forth a contrast against 'language' in its unquenched quest to reach at meaning and more intriguingly, to highlight its peculiar urge to reside through but out of language. Poetry, in words and sentiments, is thus about translating hidden/eclipsed/sheltered inscapes that are seldom transmissible; if at all rendered cognizable even from within the narrator or the 'self'. However, this longing to translate is central to the conception of a community and its self identification; in its loose definitions, its mapping of lapses/excesses on the co-ordinates of collective imagination and its association through the political interstices of differential commonalities. In Madhumita Lahiri's text *Imperfect Solidarities: Tagore, Gandhi, Du Bois and the Global Anglophone*, this idea of identification takes on the guiding motif to her argument that establishes her concerns exactly from where Benedict Anderson pauses for his theoretical respite. To Lahiri, this problem of identification and translation sprawls towards the 'undefined' and the delicate, the literary and the 'international'.

Hence, here the author explores a politics of excesses. The idea of how a community (both cultural and intellectual) can be formed through the presence of a vibrant print culture is presented



by Lahiri (like Anderson) but on seemingly different lines in comparison to Anderson's hypothesis. She not only argues on print media function to transcend community imagination (and participation) in terms of 'homogeneity' and 'originality' alone but also onto a more positive plane that can possibly interrogate boundaries (that it created for Anderson) and forge hybrid alliances (in terms of race, ethnicity and religion). This is essentially the vectorial argument that Lahiri attempts to persuade through her three, intense but cascading chapters.

While discussing on the role of the 'author function' in the introductory section of the text, she admits to have taken a cue from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 'reparative' mode of reading to skim through the 'surfaces' of possibilities in the construction of what she calls an 'interpretative community'. Of course, her methodology to substantiate her argument is central to her unexpressed but surely cautious understanding about the hermeneutics of the international. This moves against the often problematic and monolithic imagination of 'global' implications. Her notion of the 'international' is politically fragmented and diverse but aesthetically collaborative and interpretative. Through this idea of 'translating' a shared aesthetic and at times spiritual/political inheritance, she infuses her argument with an unmistakably dynamic texture that runs through her chapters while connecting these varied aspects (of the individual, spiritual and the political) with the notion of solidarities. These dynamic, amorphous and perhaps fragmented associations is perhaps what impels Lahiri to call these conceptions to be 'imperfect', quite like the incompleteness of the 'messianic' that she momentarily tickles within the explanatory sections of her foreword and covertly but repeatedly keeps on rehearsing in her core chapters.

In the prefatory statements of the text, Lahiri discusses the differences in the genre attributions of the print national/international dichotomies. To her, while 'print nationalism' is built on the forms of the novel and the newspaper, these are only 'means' to an 'end' for community imagination (or the "imaginative community" as Anderson terms it). However, 'print internationalism' relies on the tonalities of what she calls "fictionalised history" and "the print periodical" towards a collaborative community practising conscious/semi-conscious exercises on interpretation. As Lahiri puts it, "where novels can encourage nationalism by providing characters who might seem just like us, the fictionalized histories of print internationalism encourage us to read historical personages differently...we learn to see them as protagonists of ongoing struggles, whose goals, though possibly different, are none the less, relevant to our own." This essential differentiation between 'interchangeability' and 'regularity' (in ideological and interpellative terms) on one hand and "possibilities" and "erratic temporality" on the other hand leads to the realization of a different community that is even less pronounced in terms of abstractedness. This community, to the author, is one which "share ways of reading texts" and harbour actively "shared goals". Again, this community is presented to be a culmination of a rhetorical 'discourse community' and Brian Stock's "textual community" that remains indifferent to the vagaries of literacy but hinges on "political experiences" of dubious commonalities. These already existing definitions of literary/cultural importance proves instrumental in helping Lahiri find her meaning in the interpretive societies that she wishes to discover.

I have used these relevant words and quotations to assure proper credit to the authorial intentions which, right from the beginning of the text, remains deeply engaged with what seems to be a politics of excesses. To her, this inherent unpredictability about the future of a community, its negatively present but elusive defining lines and its disinterested, detached but sporadic glimpses of retrospection towards a sensible past is what is always symptomatic in its excessive anticipation. After all, all 'acts' of interpretation and literary exploration are anticipated to be 'synchronised' albeit within its obvious and already given differences (of race, geography and even distinctive experiences). However, the author repeatedly segregates these differences through which she broadly calls as the 'experience of the political'. In her text, racism is at the centre-stage of the political. And if we concur her foundational basis of the politically driven and experientially/aesthetically charged community, her anticipation is more pronounced in her depiction of the possibilities in shared



semantics of reading. This anticipation of the uncertain but the possible is perhaps which Lahiri later describes to distinguish between a 'neology' and philology and discuss faith in relation to 'suspicion' while remembering Ricoeur. Similarly, she also refers to the same anticipation when she discovers the historical ellipses and absences of the work of women apropos the texts that are discussed in Lahiri's own and propounds 'non-resolution' of possible contradictions in ways of reading when she dismisses Jameson and his 'closure' through his 'symptomatic mode' of reading.

All the three chapters in the text use the notion of 'international solidarities' from a decolonising perspective and with an intention of political resilience and companionship. In the first chapter entitled, "The Global Anglophone", the author re-discovers Japanese art history and its association with Indic spiritual knowledge systems through the conversations and literary exchanges of the art historian Okakura Kakuzo and Vivekananda, the important role played by Sister Nivedita in the process and Tagore's inheritance from their book *The Ideals of the East*. The commonality that Kakuzo finds with Indic spirituality directs Tagore's concerns his lectures in China (*Talks in China*) that Lahiri focuses on. In fact, Tagore's 'discovery' of the 'Asiatic' attitude is through divinity that is unbounded by territorial demarcations but none the less, claimed to a great effect by the spirituality of the Asian civilization, thus serving as an effective anti-colonial identity in a clash of the colonizer/colonized civilizations and attitudes. In this, the unusual and deliberate translations that Tagore penned differently (in style and tone if not intent) for his Bengali poems in English, the extraordinary success of "The Crescent Moon" as a poetic compilation in China and Tagore's generous review of the English translation of the newly translated text of Qu Yuan's *Li Sao* by Lim Boon Keng pleads a greater cause of a differently defined and uncertain literary community that the author draws our attention to. More importantly, the anxiety between inheritance and the possible is given significant focus by the 'untranslatability' of Sanskrit coinages that are meant to be culturally unrecoverable by the West and yet, not completely reductive enough to be called mere 'essentialism' (the term 'gitanjali' for example).

In the second chapter, "People of Colour", Lahiri traces back to the equation between colonisation and racial colour as she reads Gandhi's evolution as a political figure from the continent of South Africa to India and his changing notions of hierarchy and his proclaimed notions of equality. Gandhi's autobiographical writings, *Satyagraha in South Africa* and *My Experiments with Truth*, the journals and newspapers sponsored and edited by him like *The Indian Opinion*, *Hind Swaraj* and *Young India* are interestingly analysed by Lahiri to present how 'print internationalism' cut across continents of the coloniser and the colonised, the 'ancient' and the 'modern', the 'savages' and the 'gentile'. Gandhi's progression of racial understanding however does not find equal nuance in terms of an international approach and unlike Tagore, Gandhi narrows down his racial concerns only in terms of analogy and 'parable' while keeping the Indian race at the centre of his politics. Thus Lahiri reads 'satyagraha' as a neologism with its freshly anti-colonial but narrowly parochial comradeship, in relation to other colonised races, as a failure of translatability but nevertheless thinks of it as a possible site of international politics. Here, Lahiri notes how his South African secretary and admirer Sonja Schlesin while scripting Gandhi's notion of colour 'anticipated' other oppressed coloured races to follow his suit in an act of collective anticipation.

The final chapter entitled "The Global South", throws down equal possibilities of the interpretative act as Lahiri reads through Du Bois's reading of Gandhi and Gandhi's admiration for Du Bois in his act of keeping a copy of *The Crisis* in his *ashram*. Du Bois's politics is perhaps portrayed as the most mature and nuanced of them all in his invocation to different races of colour as he widens his notion of solidarity in literature to not only Afro-Americans and Africans but as he called in the later prints of his newspapers, to "people and children of colour". The two paper that Du Bois edited and published *The Crisis* and *The Brownie's Book* are overtly and covertly political with the latter having a very significant artistic and imaginative concern as well. Here, she brings in the remarkable but partially eclipsed contributions of Jessie Redmon Fauset to the popularity and artistry of the journal. Most importantly, journal redefined the notion of the

'brownie' in Fauser's hands. For instance, the neologism of the 'brownie' that had a history of cultural associations (from a benevolent spirit in folklore to a symbol of US imperialism and finally to British scout heroism) is rediscovered and recreated into a newer range of meanings. Lahiri carefully denoted how this effort at 'transcreation' becomes central to generate an interpretative community of readers that meditate on identity and politics from a perspective of heightened agency and against what Barthes would call 'lisibility'. Lahiri is brilliant in her analysis of Du Bois' *The Dark Princess* that narrates the union of an upper caste Hindu woman to a black man from the United States and the 'scriptable' future of their coloured child. In this, Du Bois not only talks about racial concerns in the West but tries to understand the politics of the East in terms of caste and colour (he uses 'caste-colour' as a new term altogether), thus opening up channels of solidarity that would mean a more international approach to oppression as a social phenomenon. This notion of solidarity is heightened in Du Bois' association with Lala Lajpat Rai and his exchanges with Du Bois. Lahiri, thus, presents a rigorous and in depth study of several uncommon politics of and in print.

Lahiri's concern with the past is but only to propose a comradeship for the present and the future. She is commendable with her research and her detailed depiction of minute instances in favour of her proposition. As I had attempted to read her engagement to read in terms of anticipation and excesses, Lahiri perhaps gives a strong voice to her mind in her deliberate but beautiful textual strategy in connecting topographies through a shared individual (Nivedita, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, Schlesin, Du Bois, Fauser, and Lajpat Rai) and a growing readership that might be deeply connected (as in the case of Du Bois and the Indian situation), middlingly warm (as for Tagore) or completely unintended (like Gandhi's case). Probably, the author shares her anticipation of a world where reading (textually and in quotidian terms) raises a spirit of solidarity with or without a politics of intention; where politics itself redeems itself in readership and companionship, where intention is relegated to the old order and politics of reading is in itself a liberating exercise; Lahiri anticipates scholarship that reads the world where literary intention is more scriptable and open to possibilities, to solidarities imperfect but none the less solidarities of the common and thus a function of the messianic.

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ISLAM AND ASIA: A HISTORY. By Chiara Formichi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 348 pp.

What is the relationship between Asia and Islam? How far back do their roots and acquaintanceship go? In *Islam and Asia: A History* (2020), Chiara Formichi answers these questions by not only decolonizing knowledge on the spread and role of Islam in and across Asia but also highlighting the role women played in this expansion: thus bringing to the reader's attention an often disregarded key element to the building of nations and the spread of a global religion. Formichi slowly unravels widely held dominant views of the influence of Islam on a global scale by offering a transregional approach as to why and how Asia and Islam are counterparts in their respective histories and developments. Formichi challenges the often considered dominance of the Middle East in Islamic development. The author brings to light a key component in the development of the global religion, Asia, and argues that the interactions between society and religion have resulted in a change in global Islamic practices. The thematically divided chapters are approached with strokes that move from the macro to the micro: covering territory and chronology, and social, religious, economic and political transformations. Beginning from the

7<sup>th</sup> century and leading up to the 1990s, the chapters, while appearing to cover a wide breadth of knowledge, are selective and purposeful in their information: Formichi chooses to focus on the locales that intervene and serve her thematic purposes well. Thus, her disclaimer in the preface sets the tone for the book and invites readers not to take this work as an “encyclopedia.” Formichi distances herself, rightfully, from providing an all-inclusive book on histories too wide and long to be contained in a single piece of work: “Hence, whereas I have attempted a balanced coverage of Asia’s subregions – defined as Central, South, East, and Southeast – with relevant references to the Muslim Mediterranean, this book is by no means a complete survey of “Islam” in each and every polity/nation in “Asia” (xii). Formichi’s theoretical contribution is critical and vital, especially in the current era: she places at the forefront, the aim to bridge together two fields rarely put together: Islamic Studies and Asian Studies. Combined beautifully in this book, these two fields enrich one another and open up new pathways to consider the past, present, and future of both fields: as separate and combined.

Alongside riveting case studies, Formichi’s writing excels and shines most at the level of writing and engagement with readers. With further readings, contexts, and background information beautifully integrated into her text, Formichi speaks not only to the critic or researcher in the field but also to the new reader encountering the topics at hand for the first time. The opening pages indicate that the book is dedicated to her students, and up until the final pages, Formichi delivers a resource students from all fields can use. Furthermore, her explanations on the (problematics of) translation and concluding remarks at the end of each chapter equip her text with both the ease and comfort readers from all backgrounds can appreciate. This book is a great toolbox to further navigate the wide topic of Islam and Asia. Perhaps one of the strongest elements of her work is the detailed attention paid to the Arabic words, religious terms, and historical figures. By providing “box[es]” that interrupt the flow of the text, Formichi emphasizes the need to understand the context behind the discussion before proceeding any further: this accessibility strengthens Formichi’s text.

*Islam and Asia* illustrates the active nature of religion, cultures, borders, and society. It transforms once presumed fixed entities, into areas of networks, trade, change, and advancement in the dissemination of knowledge in every sphere, from social to political. Formichi, in her own words, brings us to “reflect on how 1,400 years after Muhammad received the first revelation in Mecca, the perceived “syncretic” and “peripheral” Southeast Asia can be regarded as breeding grounds for new interpretative paths” (262). From the Islamic call from 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia to the development of a global religion in the 1990s, Formichi’s text traces the large magnitude of this spread, noting the changes in society and the impact of/on religion in Asia. Thus, although not an encyclopedic rendition of the spread of Islam, this book is great for those wanting to get a good understanding of the effect and role of religion in shaping histories, borders, and society with the vital and often disregarded discussion of the role of women in these exchanges.

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FROM OBSCURITY TO LIGHT: WOMEN IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ORISSA (SEVENTH TO TWELFTH CENTURIES AD). By Devika Rangachari. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 272 p.

“I learnt history as unquestionably as I did geography, without ever dreaming that there could be more than one view of past events.”

– Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*

Revisiting historical constructions and reexamining the past from a gendered perspective is a vital exercise in gender studies. It facilitates a questioning of accepted historical narratives that tend to ignore, diminish, trivialize and invisibilize women's role, existence, agency and contributions in shaping socio-political realities. While reevaluating women of early medieval Orissa, a time when patriarchy was the norm, one would find instances of transgression that the majority of historians have suppressed, overlooked or deemed irrelevant.

In the book, *From Obscurity to Light: Women in Early Medieval Orissa*, Devika Rangachari sets out to reintegrate women into the historical narratives of early medieval Orissa. She consistently shows the inadequacy of research done on the roles of women in the early medieval period and highlights women's agency, power, authority and public status, which have been intentionally or unintentionally dismissed by most of the secondary sources. The secondary research that does exist only describes women in their subordinate, secondary and passive roles as wives and mothers, who always operate within their confines. Her earlier works have also challenged the limited and inaccurate description of women in the histories of Kashmir, Kanauj, Bengal and Bihar. Hence, this work also draws interesting parallels and contrasts between women from different Indian and European regions in the same period, based on the commonality of experience.

The book relies on an extensive analysis of epigraphic evidence rather than literary sources. Rangachari studies one hundred and eighty-seven inscriptions issued by royal and non-royal sources written in Sanskrit and Telugu, delimited by the time period under consideration. The charters and inscriptions document the presence and contributions of royal and non-royal women, indicating their power, public status and the varied significant roles they played in their kingdoms. The book is divided into five sections, including a comprehensive introduction and conclusion.

The first two chapters elucidate the political history of the period from the seventh to the twelfth centuries AD. Orissa was earlier known by the names Kalinga, Utkala, Odra and Kosala. The rise and fall of different dynasties of this period and their power dynamics are explored. The different kingdoms within Orissa were built in the areas near the river valleys, which offered great agricultural potential. The varied conquests, contestations of power, alliances, integration of scattered or nuclear regions and the incorporation and unification of neighbouring areas into the 'political centres' gave rise to the "great medieval Orissan empire." The author takes into account the lineages of the Sailodbhavas, the Bhaumakaras, the Bhanjas, the Sarabhapuriyas, the Panduvamsis, the Somavamsis and the Imperial Gangas. These dynasties and their rulers are identified and catalogued using epigraphic records like copper plates, archaeological evidence, references from Puranas, stone, cave and temple inscriptions. The royal titles, conquests, wars, family branches, enmity, marital alliances and religious practices of each dynasty is discussed. The prevailing deities and religions in this period included Saivism (Shiva), Buddhism, Vaisnavism (Visnu), Saktism (Sakti) and the autochthonous deity Stambhesvari, the highly influential tribal mother goddess. The rulers utilised different origin myths, drawing from puranic and tribal elements, for legitimising their claims to rule and gain the support of the people. The inscriptions also reveal interesting conflicts and hostility through the mentioning or deliberate omission of members of the dynasty, thus, undermining their contributions to the kingdom.

The following two chapters carry out a critical gendered analysis of the different kingdoms of medieval Orissa. The third chapter, titled "a gendered perspective," examines the presence of royal and non-royal women in the Bhaumakara, Bhanja, Sailodbhava, Sarabhapuriya and Panduvamsi dynasties and the fourth chapter offers "a gendered perspective" on the Somavamsis, Early Gangas and Imperial Gangas. In the stereotypical mainstream narratives of the period, women are constantly marginalized by focusing only on the male rulers, diminishing women's contributions and not acknowledging them as powerful rulers in their own right.

Rangachari begins by highlighting the significance of several women rulers in the Bhaumakara dynasty. The queen Tribhuvanamahadevi I "reluctantly" ascended the throne, and her legitimacy

was justified by citing the example of an earlier woman ruler, Gosvami Devi. A parallel is drawn here with the rulers Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir. The next queen Hiramahadevi only ruled as a regent till her sons came of age. Queen Prithivimahadevi assertively ruled in a hostile atmosphere knowing that there were other legitimate male contenders for the throne. Queen Gaurimahadevi is known as her husband's successor, and she is succeeded by her daughter Dandimahadevi, who is referred to as the "last great ruler of Bhaumakara dynasty." She is succeeded by Vakulamahadevi, who, in turn, is followed by the last Bhaumakara queen, Dharmamahadevi, both of whom were supported by the Bhanjas. Some of the titles assumed by these queens were that of *paramamahesvari*, *paramabhattacharika*, *maharajadhiraja*, *paramavaisnavi* and sometimes male appellations like *Srimad-tribhuvanamahadevyah* or *Srimad-dandimaha-devyah*. Many such queens' accession to the throne also foregrounds the centrality of preserving the dynasty by turning to immediate kindred, even if it is a woman ruler, instead of turning to patrilineage. This act of assuming gender-bending roles outside their prescribed gendered position or 'good womanhood' comes across as a form of circumventing patriarchal norms.

There were multiple kinds of matrimonial alliances that took place in this period. Some marriages were a means of gaining power, fortune and military prowess (Sivakaradeva I and Jayavalidevi). Some marital alliances had expansionist motives, which facilitated the growing power of the queen and her natal family over her spouse's dynasty. At times, the queen's natal family aided her accession to power after her spouse's death. Some marriages were motivated by diplomatic and territorial interests to neutralise enemies, win political allies, promote peace and cordial relations between the kingdoms (Prithivimahadevi and Subhakaradeva IV, and Lokaprakasa and Bharata-vala). The author attempts to draw parallels here with women's participation in strategic matrimonial alliances in England. But it is difficult to determine the degree of agency exercised by women in the matter of their marriages in medieval Orissa. Sweeping statements such as a situation in England is "equally applicable" to a situation in Orissa may not be well-founded.

The Bhanja queens were responsible for permitting and affixing official seals on documents and executing royal grants, which also had to be issued in their presence. Likewise, the royal women of Early Gangas were also witnesses and signatories for grant charters. The fact that these queens were present during these events has been thoroughly noted in the inscriptions. Many rulers issued grants on behalf of their queens or on their suggestions. Many queens issued charters of their own, which were unmistakably seen as assertions of their space in the dynastic lineage and concretising their names in history. Women donors were also mentioned in their families' plates, charters and inscriptions. These grants were made on occasions like *sankranti*, marriages, lunar eclipse and solar eclipse. They included gifts of villages, lands, religious establishments, offerings to a deity, cows, goats, gold, sandal, incense, camphor, daily supply of flowers, perpetual lamps to be burned before a deity and a regular supply of clarified butter for the lamps, food and clothing for mendicants, Brahmanas and their families. Most grants were issued to accrue religious and spiritual merit for the king, queen and their parents.

Royal women often sanctioned the building of temples and shrines as well. One such Siva temple was made on behalf of queen Madhadevi. The deity installed therein was named Madhavesvara after her, indicating her power and authority. Interestingly, her husband was a follower of Buddhism. Another such example is that of Tribhuvanamahadevi, who was a devotee of Visnu, while her husband was Buddhist. Such instances of exercising freedom in observing separate religions signify the woman's agency in choosing her form of worship.

The inscriptions of the Imperial Gangas distinctly mention the names of both royal and non-royal women who were the donors or the recipients of grants. Non-royal women included temple maids (*devadasis*), maids of the royal household and dancing women, whose donations were indicative of their access to financial resources and the desire to record their names for posterity. The mothers and wives of the donors and the donees are meticulously mentioned in



the records. Royal and non-royal women sometimes shared the same space by inscribing on the same temple walls, without any segregation, during the rule of Codaganga. These donations and building activities were often done in different capacities and were deliberate acts that signified the donor's public status, prestige and socio-political and economic power.

A meticulous study of all available sources by Indian and non-Indian scholars also shows that cultural contacts existed between medieval Orissa and other countries like China. In some parts of the book, the arguments seem to be based more on probability and interpretation, where the author finds strong reason to believe in particular possibilities, rather than the actual presence of evidence. This may be attributed to a lack of sources and the fragmentary remains of some inscriptions, as the author has acknowledged at the outset of chapter three. The uniqueness of this work stems from the fact that it touches upon many aspects that were, according to the author, insufficiently researched or incorrectly represented.

Rangachari's gendered analysis is an attempt to make historical narratives more accurate, inclusive and comprehensive by situating women as relevant historical figures. Instead of discussing women as a homogenous category, she considers their different classes and contextual variations. The author successfully demonstrates that various readings of the same historical evidence are possible, and it proves to be fruitful in reconstructing the historical period. As the epigraphic evidence shows, women exercised agency in various formal and informal modes and had considerable influence on socio-political, economic and religious spheres. Women didn't exist on the periphery as most biased secondary sources would have everyone believe. The author emphasises the need to construct new images of women as "authors and actors," whose actual contributions and positions in society are recognised by interrogating historical narratives and reinterpreting the original sources.

### Works Cited

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MODERNISM AFTER POSTCOLONIALISM: TOWARD A NONTERRITORIAL COMPARATIVE LITERATURE. By Mara de Gennaro. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2020. 234 pp.

This book is a major commentary on the use of comparative methodology in understanding literary works. It tries to take up an interesting perception towards understanding of modernism. It focuses on the anxiety at the master's end regarding the performance that is demanded from the master to maintain the superior position. Gennaro takes up this issue of anxiety to a step ahead and considers it as one of the major aspects that creates and alters international boundaries. She also considers the same to be a key role player in the politics of state power. She comments on the multilayeredness of the term identity in relation to politics, power and so on.

In Gennaro's book it is really interesting to have a glimpse of a new perception that she is trying to develop on modernism and postcolonialism. It is a general tendency to take up Eurocentric or North American centric texts for such critical studies, whereas, here Gennaro was bold enough to break free from this general and archetypical tendency. She takes up Anglophone and Francophone texts for the critical evaluation of issues like colonialism, racism along with 'ethnic' and nationalist discourses. She speaks of Gayatri Spivak, Édouard Glissant, Françoise Vergès,



Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf along with postcolonial writers like Aimé Césaire, Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, J.M. Coetzee, Edwidge Danticat and so on. Thus imperialism appears as the common backdrop of this work. To encompass these almost transnational perceptions of literary criticism she deploys comparative practices. Her comparative approach in reading the familiar in the context of the unfamiliar seem to be very interesting. This comparative approach alarms the readers regarding the relations that are unspoken and in some cases are misrecognized. In this book Gennaro tries to challenge the general trends of territorialization of any literary text. She emphasizes on the nonterritorial aspect of reading texts in her attempts to get connected to the unconnected. Her shift from the Eurocentric reading of a text results into her shift from the global practices of comparatists to the point where she can establish textual and contextual connections. Her task as a comparatist is enriched here in her understanding and establishment of the aspect of uncertainty. In this book she has also tried to accommodate the contemporary political nuances. This book shows cases author's close and critical reading of the text and gives a very interesting account of her understanding of the same in a new light. She also highlights the effectiveness of the comparative methodology to study literary texts in a world of shifting parameters.

The book could also be read as an intervention into our understanding of the literary histories. This approach in turn results into the formation of a different framework of reading modernism in the context of postcolonialism. Gennaro's attempt in this work could be read as an approach that has taken postcolonial studies ahead and has contemporized its approach towards critical understanding of literary texts.

Gennaro has attempted to give new dimension to the poetics of the anxious master within the framework of a contemporized postcoloniality. The book is quite capable of estranging the reader from his or her known realm of modernism, as she is trying to deterritorialize the same and in the process is redefining the application of modernity in literary criticism. She is looking into the issues of normalization of language usages as a part of the imperialist imposition of language and cultural practices from a fresh point of view, where she is engaging with the aspect of white supremacy afresh. She beautifully and very neutrally examines the nuances of confrontation between the white wanderer or explorer with the "fearsome black otherness". In her work of analysis Gennaro has given space to the importance of storytelling in the process of self discovery. She then highlights the paradox of the process of self discovery which in many cases do turn out to be a failure. In this book she identifies the perceptions trained in western eye, that engages in looking for the sameness with the master, responsible for this failure.

Gennaro tries to interpret the major works of all these previously mentioned authors from both prewar and interwar time period, under the light of postcolonialism. In the due course she also incorporates historiography and cultural theory. Gennaro's effort could also be recognized as the attempts to contribute to the postcolonial studies with an interdisciplinary approach. Categories like identity, culture, and community and so on tend to get deterritorialized in Gennaro's work. Her attempt to break free from the rigid framework of knowledge and evaluating the Eurocentric texts under the light of post-colonial studies contemporizes this book. Her attempt to recognize, contemporize and redefine comparative literature and its methodology is extremely appreciable. It deterritorializes the Eurocentric modernism and establishes the relevance of comparative methodology. I hope this book would always be referred in the debates on postcolonialism and modernism and would also open up new dimensions of thought in the critical analysis of literary texts redefining the relevance of comparative literature in the process of understanding literature. Reading of this book, I believe, is capable of opening up new possibilities of research and reading of modernism in the context of postcolonialism, and thus would inspire innovative research works in future.

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MEMORY, METAPHOR AND MYSTICISM IN KĀLIDĀSA'S ABHIJÑĀNĀŚĀKUNTALAM. By Namrata Chaturvedi (Ed.). London: Anthem Press, 2020. 252 pp.

The book *Memory, Metaphor and Mysticism in Kālidāsa's Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, edited by Namrata Chaturvedi, locates Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* in a dialogic terrain to understand this literary masterpiece from various vantage points. The collection of essays in this volume also demolishes the traditional binary-based conception of the play that it is either a Hindu text or a simple love story narrated in an exotic oriental setting. One can say for certain that the book is definitely a sign of hope in the current academic context where classical literature and literary studies are often invoked either to criticize them blindly or to valorize them in an uncritical manner. Chaturvedi does not fall into this trap which a native scholar can easily get into. The current volume of essays deftly problematizes Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* with great academic rigor, and does not treat the play in the same old cavalier fashion in which the text is usually dealt with.

The book is divided into four sections which deal with four broad aspects of the play, the aesthetics and philosophy of the text, the reception of the text through commentaries, the aesthetics and politics of translation and finally its performance on the stage. The essays under these broadheads not only answer the questions that they take up, but also pose newer questions for scholars in this field to explore in the future. The first section—Meter, Structure and *Dhvani*—delves deep into the philosophical and aesthetic significance of the play in a manner hitherto unexplored. This is also an attempt to restore the play in its actual aesthetic and philosophical contexts. The essays in this section are contributed by scholars such as Ramkishor Maholia, Sheldon Pollock, H. S. Shivaprakash and Namrata Chaturvedi, and Felix Wilfred. Ramkishor Maholia throws light into the philosophical and spiritual significance of the metaphors used by Kālidāsa in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, and convincingly argues that Kālidāsa's choice of specific figures of speech and poetic meter is not random or accidental, but clearly planned and meditated so as to enhance the message he intends to convey through his verse. Pollock's article "What Happens in Śākuntalā: Conceptual and Formal Symmetries" is a powerful rejoinder to the reductionist moral reading of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* made by orientalist through the reductionist lens of fate and chastity. H. S. Shivaprakash and Namrata Chaturvedi examine the poetic and theological resonance of Kashmir Śaiva tradition in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* and brilliantly investigate the presence of the *śhaivite* idea of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) in the play. Felix Wilfred's article finds the thematic and poetic parallels between the Bible and *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* by analyzing the story of Hagar and the aesthetically brilliant Song of Songs vis-a-vis *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*.

The second section titled 'Commentaries and Criticisms' showcases the multifaceted manner in which the play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is received in various spatio-temporal locations through a thorough exploration of the commentaries on the play. This section contains essays by Wagish Shukla, Radhavallabh Tripathi, Godabarisha Mishra. Wagish Shukla explores the political and social significance of the *gāndharva* style of marriage between Duṣyanta and Śākuntalā, and relates it to other forms of marriage found in texts like *Mahābhārata*. Considering the thematic specialty of Shukla's article, this would have been better suited in the previous section. Radhavallabh Tripathi takes us through the highlights of the major commentaries on *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* with a view to understanding the different reception of the same text in various cultural and temporal locations. Godabarisha Mishra's essay explores in detail *Sārāthadīpikā*, an *advaita* commentary of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* where Parīkṣittu Tampurān, the king of Kochin, looks at Duṣyanta through the paradigm of Advaita Vedānta.

The third section—'Varied Grammars of Love'—which includes essays by Sunil Sharma, Khalid Alvi and Gokul Sinha explores the politics and aesthetics of the various translations of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. Sunil Sharma critically analyzes the four Persian translations of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* brought out in the twentieth century. Khalid Alvi talks about *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* in the Hindustani tradition by analyzing the poetic and dramatic translations of the play in Urdu in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. Gokul Sinha engages with the famous Nepali poet Laxmi Prasad Devakota's three translations of the play—two in Nepali and one in English—and answers the question why the great poet Devakota produced three translations of the same text. Sinha article also becomes a detailed investigation into the creative minds of these two great minds.

As we all know a drama is primarily meant to be staged. The last section of the book, 'On the Stage Personal Engagements with a Lived Tradition,' is a powerful engagement with the experience of actors who staged *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. The two essays in this section are contributed by the two veteran actor scholars—Kamalesh Dutt Tripathi and J. Sreenivas Murthy. Kamalesh Dutt's article gives the readers a good glimpse into his life-long engagement with the text and challenges he faced while staging it for a modern audience. Murthy's essay deals with his experience of having engaged with the play in the classroom and on the stage. It shows how differently, yet uniquely, he dealt with the text both as a teacher and an artist. The essay which is interspersed with personal accounts also gives the readers an account of the pedagogical challenges and innovations one has to make to teach the drama in a classroom.

By looking at the same author and text from multiple vantage points, the book reterritorializes the traditional canonical boundaries set for reading *Śākuntalam*. Lucidly written and academically rigorous, Chaturvedi's book will certainly be an asset to the existing scholarship on Kālidāsa.

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TARUṆYAŚATAKAM OF KSHIROD CHANDRA DASH. By Subhasree Dash. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2021, 391 pp.

**N**oted Sanskrit poet and professor Kshirod Chandra Dash's *Tarūṇyaśatakam*, first published in 1991, is a collection of 102 independent metrical Sanskrit stanzas in six chapters on youth, beauty, and love. The present work is a translation in English and Odia by Subhasree Dash, a third translation in Hindi by Ajaya Kumar Patnaik, along with a *Prakāśikā* Sanskrit commentary by Braja Kishore Nayak.

The stanzas in *Tarūṇyaśatakam* narrate a love story in verse form with jubilation and passion. They offer a miniscule account addressing exquisite moments and delicate facets of life in a light-hearted manner and portrays the central theme of love beautifully. The application of Puranic allusions, soliloquies, and epigrammatic expressions treats the poetic moods and events with sympathy and sensitivity. The connecting thread of *ṛṅgāra*/semblance of *ṛṅgāra* presents a wreath of one hundred and two lyrical blooms, each with its distinguished glow, evoking the spirit of humour and mirth that unfolds romantic mood and communicates joy at leisure. Each stanza has a title of its own in Sanskrit with its English substitute that highlight the central theme of love inherent in it.

The first chapter of this book presents the background and theme of the work, the place of lyric in Sanskrit literary tradition, the objectives of the study, the Indian approach to poetry, and

Dash's academic achievements and his contributions to the lyrical and other genres of Sanskrit literature like biography, autobiography, etc. The second chapter presents the original text with commentary followed by a translation in the three languages with critical notes. The third chapter delves into Sanskrit literary theory and criticism and the application of these theories and critical vocabularies on the text such as the *alaṅkāras* or figures of speech. Here the aspects of beautiful poetry are considered from the point of view of decorative devices in literary art as it is said that 'a damsel's face, though beautiful, does not shine forth if it should be devoid of ornaments' (Bhāmaha, 2.13).

From the works of great poets it is observed that figures of speech order language, explore reality, and enhance the poetic delight. Different figures of sound and sense that encompass the poetic lines of the text are *anuprāsa* (alliteration with different subdivisions), *upamā* (simile), *rūpaka* (metaphor), *apahnuti* (concealment), *utprekṣā* (poetic fancy), *atiśayoktiḥ* (hyperbole), *samāsoktiḥ* (modal metaphor/ brevity of speech), *kāvyaṅga* (poetic reason), *vibhāvanā* (peculiar causation), *arthāntaranyāsa* (corroboration), *arthāpatti* (presumption), *parikara* (insinuation), *ullekha* (representation), *śleṣa* (paronomasia), etc capture the readers' mind with a poetic mood for a long time. The analysis continues with the application of the theory of *guṇa* and *rīti* on the text. This chapter further contributes to the study of the text with the application of the doctrine of *rasa* and *rasābhāsa* and *dhvani*. The fourth chapter points out a few poetic blemishes in the text like *grāmyatā-doṣa* and *anavikṛta-doṣa* with a note that few of the blemishes are not acceptable in the canvas of lyric.

The fifth chapter explains the importance of meter in Sanskrit lyric poetry from the Vedic period till the present day. Indian poetic tradition has deemed solecism and lapses in metrical compositions as significant. Some meters like *indravajrā*, *upendravajrā*, *vaṁsastha*, *indravaṁśā*, *drutavilambita*, *totakam*, *vasantatilakā*, *mandākrāntā*, *śikhariṇī*, *śārdūlavikṛḍitam*, and *sragdharā* have proved their usefulness to the context of description. The study shows that melody, music and imagination reside in the heart of lyric poetry where rhythm with marked regularity enjoys immense importance. Use of various meters in the book does away with the monotony of expression and recitation. The meters with higher number of syllables create bigger canvas for the presentation of a prolonged idea of love and beauty and this evoke *sattva-bhāva* in the heart of connoisseurs for experiencing ultimate poetic delight.

The concluding chapter lists the merits of lyric poetry and remarks that any poetic work is not a phenomenon of evolution but a unique perception of the artist, and one should not consider it as an improvement over the earlier poets. In addition to the rhyming phrases, the rhythmic expressions are preserved as much as possible in all the three translations. It is said that a transparent translation is seldom beautiful and a beautiful translation is seldom transparent. The translators have tried their best in seeking a fine balance.

Although, this work of translation misses the Roman transliteration of the original Sanskrit text, the approach and treatment have been adept and laudable. The scholarly commentary by Nayak is also noteworthy. He has tried to explore the nuances of meaning highlighting meters and figures of speech in a way that glorify the text and the end of lyric poetry at large. No commentary is said to have a final say on any work of poetry. Yet, Nayak's *Prakāśikā* has all possible literary comments. The book also contains an exhaustive list of citations, bibliography, index of verses, glossary of Sanskrit terms, and a *kaviprasaṁsā* (in praise of the poet) by L. K. Satapathi Sharma. Dash's command over Sanskrit language and composition and his creative imagination add unique taste and beauty to this work. More translations like these are called for to make a wider aesthetic appeal of the Sanskrit language.

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THE COMICS WORLD: COMIC BOOKS, GRAPHIC NOVELS, AND THEIR PUBLICS.  
By Benjamin Woo and Jeremy Stoll (Eds.). Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 250 pp.

This book takes the readers on an exciting tour to an imaginary industrial setup, where we are shown the three major stages in the life cycle of comics. It begins with the authorial persona asking the reader to “Imagine a world with comic books and graphic novels at its centre”, with a promise of an adventure trip to the “exciting, messy world of comics”. We are shown different ways of looking at the comics world which is inhabited by the agents, institutions, and social fields that form and are formed through their relationships with comics and graphic novels.

The book explores the “three big moments” in the existence of comics: production, circulation, and reception, which also resonates with the structure of the classic model of communication. Thus, we are made to understand the world of comics through the lens of economics among other disciplines. For instance, a couple of essays are dedicated to examining the field of comics from a social scientific point of view and also from the perspective of sociology and political science. Thus, Benjamin Woo and Jeremy Stoll appear not only as social psychologists but also as historians, folklorists, business analysts, and rhetoric scholars, among other specialisms. Their accounts of comics are rooted in the social and cultural contexts where comics are created, circulated, and consumed.

The book intends to attain three-fold objectives: (1) to help establish comics and graphic novels as an area of research within social-science disciplines (2) to bring together examples and present some findings from a range of case studies that can enrich an understanding of contemporary and historical comics and (3) to promote interdisciplinary dialogue across the humanities/social sciences divide and thus strengthen comics studies as a field.

The term Comics work is “as applicable as much as to Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize-winning epic *Maus* as it is to a 12-page, photocopied, hand-stapled zine given out for free at a small-town comics convention attended by ten people, never to be seen again” The writers intend to problematize comics and graphic novels in order to encourage a reflection on how they appear as a problem to be investigated and on what we want to know about them. We are introduced to the world of comics as “one of the many art worlds” and as a “collection of individuals necessary for the production of works that the world defines as comics”. However, there is no single, unified comics world. There are as many potential comic worlds as there are kinds of comics. The writers have rightly labelled the world of comics as an “exciting” yet nevertheless “messy” world of comics, the word messy here is used in the most positive possible meaning of the term indicating the pluralistic characteristic of this world as it is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary and even undisciplined. The book grapples with the complexity of what comics and graphic novels mean to different people at different times and for different reasons.

The process of Production is an entry point into the world of comics which leads us to the scene of the birth of comics and how different people come together to contribute to the process of creation. Under this section, the book talks about the genesis of the comics world. The writers assert that the lineage of comics cannot be linked with mythology since the “modern-mythology” rhetoric erases the labour performed by its creators. Rather, they insist that roots of comics can be linked with “named people who are trying to make a living from their artistic labour” and in this multifaceted Industrial setup, the writers introduce us to the Comics Workforce who are equivalent to “creative workers in comics” who perform work, “whether paid or not, that affect the content or aesthetic presentation of a comic book, graphic novel, minicomic, or webcomic that was made available to the public in English in 2010 or later.” This entry point helps us in identifying



comics' impact and in return get impacted upon in the social world. From this point onwards we are led to see the role of comics existing in dynamic relationships with intermediaries and audiences.

Comics production is not merely limited to comics publishing, in the traditional sense of the term. "What we're looking at is not so much an industry as an ecology, a space where different kinds of comics-making activities, many of them only semi-professionalized, are taking place (Woo 2018)". For instance, Melbourne is cited as an epitome of the centres of comics production. Pierre Bourdieu's theories of the cultural field and contemporary creative industries are also applied to examine the elements that encourage the production and circulation of comics in Melbourne, which offers a new kind of cultural tourism. The reasons for the high levels of sustainability and growth apparent in Melbourne comics are that it redresses gender imbalances among both creators and audiences and produces a variety to choose from for consumers, as a result of which, "The Melbourne comics scene is a participatory culture where consumers often become producers and producers are still enthusiastic audiences for their peers' comics" (Baccini). According to Baccini, "there is a circular pattern between competition, diversity, and innovation" found in Melbourne's comics world.

The book also addresses the issue of representation of women in the sector of comics production. It aims to show that women too, have had significant careers as comic artists and also attempts to explain how their careers have been rendered invisible. It points out the main reasons behind the "ghettoization of many female cartoonists", one of which is the assumption that "works created by women are often assumed to be necessary for women". This conception had led to the prevalence of gendered genre comic books especially in Japan and South Korea. Other Asian countries also have histories of their own girls' comics besides Japanese *shôjo* manga (girls' comics) and their Korean equivalents. The early *shôjo* manga presented stories as fairy tales of princesses with magical powers, romances deeply rooted in a Cinderella complex. B. S. Jamuna, in her analysis of *Amar Chitra Katha*, reported that women are bestowed an image which becomes "metaphorically a dispossession of identity," and are "transformed to a spectacle for men's pleasure and of women's helplessness," and "relegated to a peripheral position," "treated harshly and afflicted with the "women in refrigerator syndrome." Whereas, Anant Pai, the creator of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series, while defending himself against accusations that he depicted women negatively, said that "Negative portrayals were necessary to preserve historical accuracy" (Lent 2004).

There are such stereotypes that remain in Asian comics, but with the entry of more women into the ranks of cartoonists, metamorphoses have occurred. The metamorphoses can be largely witnessed towards the end of the twentieth century, where isolated instances of the imaging of women differently from the "traditional, hackneyed way" can be found in works like Manjula Padmanabhan's creation, the newspaper strip *Suki* in 1982, featuring a character described as the "quintessential free-spirited urban Indian woman struggling to make her choices in a seriously unfriendly world." This, however, testifies the fact that a rich history of women creating and promoting comics in many Asian countries does exist, however, it is duly acknowledged that women cartoonists have rarely had the same opportunities as their male peers.

The book proceeds to the second stage of circulation, the process which takes the newly made comics to their journey forward "to find their way to readers". In traditional print media, the term circulation referred to the number of copies of a periodical that were sold and stood as a crude proxy for a publication's readership. In contemporary cultural theory, circulation refers to the "way of understanding how the movement of objects configures social relations." (Straw 2010). The public's organized around these "cultures of circulation" are pertinent intermediaries that "shape and are shaped by comics' circulatory matrix".

The reception of the world of comics is open to children as well as adults. The multimodal nature of these texts has something in common with video games and convergence culture. Children are thus able to understand quite complex and sophisticated relations between different



modes and media because these worlds are designed with lucidity and forethought that enable them to decode them. In this way, even “a very arcane vocabulary, found in comics based on Shakespeare’s plays becomes lucidly meaningful to even small children”. In this context, a comic book can be seen as a kind of “pocket-book theatre.” Akin to a play in which Shakespeare’s language is situated in action and is visually performed, the comic text offers the needful. While comic books have largely been imagined as entertainment commodities, yet, this is not the only use to which they can be put. Education is another standpoint which makes comics studies and the comics world relevant for mature consumers. In chapters by Shari Sabeti and Valerie Wieskamp, works that have been created for specific and distinctive purposes and circulated in spaces of education and gender-based are discussed. Sabeti’s “All That Shakespeare Stuff” examines the producers of graphic-novel and manga adaptations of Shakespearean plays, arguing that producers embed conceptualizations of cultural and educational value in their adaptations. In “Learning to ‘Speak without Shame,’” Wieskamp discusses Priya’s Shakti, a multimedia comic project intended as a culturally authentic response to and intervention in the problem of sexual violence in India.

Thus by following the movement of comics and their publics, we are led towards an understanding of how a given part of a comics world is embedded within the larger structures. We are shown how the orientation of one public, that is, from creators onwards to another, that is specific audiences, impacts the social life of comic art. The moment of reception too is not just limited to merely reading in the narrow sense. The text argues that “media consumption can only be understood as part of a practice that is not itself ‘about’ media.” So, in order to fully understand comics’ reception, we must try to understand how they enter into ordinary people’s lives and the uses to which they are put. Our work as researchers, teachers, scholars, and readers also has a valuable impact on the comics world.

At the closure, we are offered one last public for comics and graphic novels in the form of an interview with Charles Hatfield and Franny Howes. The authors have very succinctly brought forward the idea that Production, Circulation, and Reception are not isolated but interconnected moments. They seem to overlap and the boundaries between them get blurred as these social worlds within the worlds of comics are very much interdependent. The writers have been successful in whetting our interest in comics and graphic novels as an area of research and in enabling an understanding of contemporary and historical comics by promoting interdisciplinary dialogues which have thus helped them in making a strong case for comics as a promising field of studies.

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## JOURNALS RECEIVED

*British Journal of Aesthetics, Comparative Literature, New Literary History, Poetics Today, Philosophy and Literature, Critical Inquiry, Journal of Modern Literature, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*

The *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (ISSN 0252-8169) is a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, India since 1977. Vishvanatha Kaviraja, most widely known for his masterpiece in aesthetics, *Sahityadarpana* or the Mirror of Composition, was a prolific 14th-century Indian poet, scholar, and rhetorician. The Institute was founded by Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla (1942–2020) on 22 August 1977, coinciding with the birth centenary of renowned philosopher, aesthetician, and art historian, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), to promote interdisciplinary studies and research in comparative literature, cultural theory, aesthetics, philosophy and criticism of the arts, art history, and history of ideas. He edited and published the journal for over 40 years as the founding editor.

The journal is committed to comparative and cross-cultural issues in literary understanding and interpretation, aesthetic theories, and conceptual analysis of art. It also publishes special issues on critical theories of current interest. It has published the finest of essays by authors of global renown like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, John Hoppers, John Fisher, Murray Krieger, Martin Bucco, Remo Ceserani, J B Vickery, Menachem Brinker, Milton Snoeyenbos, Mary Wiseman, Ronald Roblin, T R Martland, S C Sengupta, K R S Iyengar, V K Chari, S K Saxena, Gordon Epperson, Judith Lochhead, Charles Altieri, Martin Jay, Jonathan Culler, Richard Shusterman, Robert Kraut, T J Diffey, T R Quigley, R B Palmer, Keith Keating, and others. Some of these celebrated essays have been published by Routledge in book format.

The journal is indexed and abstracted in the MLA International Bibliography, Master List of Periodicals (USA), Ulrich's Directory of Periodicals, ERIH PLUS, The Philosopher's Index, CNKI, WorldCat Directory, PhilPapers, EBSCO, ProQuest, Literature Online, Gale (Cengage), ACLA, Academic Resource Index, United States Library of Congress, and the British Library. It is also indexed in numerous university (central) libraries, state and public libraries, and scholarly organizations/ learned societies databases.

Celebrated scholars of the time like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, Mircea Eliade, Monroe Beardsley, John Hoppers, John Fisher, M H Abrams, John Boulton, and many Indian and Western scholars had been members of its Editorial Board.

## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SUSTAINING FUND

The *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* is the official organ of Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, India, registered under the Societies Registration Act No. XXI of 1860 (No. 13094/2030 of 1977–78). All contributions, institutional or individual, to the sustaining fund will be gratefully acknowledged. Voluntary donations to the Institute are deductible from income tax returns under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act, 1961 as the Journal is a non-profit academic publication. Advertising space in the Journal (limited to material of scholarly interest to our readers) is also available.

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